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DISCARD

THE LIFE OF ROBERT BROWNING

by EDWARD DOWDEN

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INTRODUCTION

THE natural prelude to Dowden's volume on Browning, here reprinted, is the autobiographical one, to be drawn from his own letters and poems. They reveal what it was that made the interpretation of Browning so congenial, and show how his long intimate acquaintance with his subject rendered the book much more than a literary performance. The references in the letters are casual enough, but they are not the less personally significant. In September 28, 1865, we find him writing, "The great news (if you had heart disease I wouldn't tell it—I should break it to you) is that Mr. Robert Browning has a new poem forthcoming." He seems to be hesitating over the poet for a moment in the next sentence, but when he rallies to his flag loyally in the next sentence, where he says the greatest men are the ones to live by. In the first flight he puts four—Shakespeare, Goethe, Dante, and Cervantes. Then, in the second flight, follow nine—Wordsworth, Spenser, Chaucer, Milton, Burns, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, and Shelley. After which come honest poets like Clough and Crabbe. Thirty-four years later, on February 22, 1899, he writes from Buona Vista, Killiney,—"I spent all yesterday reading the letters of Browning and Mrs. Browning, which are not a book, but a pair of pulsing hearts (yet veiled by light).'" There is also a letter, of an earlier period, which encloses a "dramatic lyric," but written confessedly in the Tennysonian mode, not the Browningesque.

When we turn from Dowden's prose to his verse confession-book, it is to come upon the same fond evidence. He had the art of the disciple when he liked, and he paid the homage of the poet to a favourite master, expressed in terms imaginative and (in the Browning way) dramatic, when he wrote these lines:

> . . . "I sat me down
> Upon a red stone flung on the red sand,
> In length as great as some sarcophagus
> Which holds a king, but scribbled with no runes,
> Bald, and unstained by lichen or grey moss.

Save me no living thing in that red land
Showed under heaven; no furtive lizard slipped,
No desert weed pushed upward the tough spine
Or hairy lump, no slow bird was a spot
Of moving black on the deserted air,
Or stationary, shrilled his tuneless cry;
No shadow stirred, nor luminous haze uprose,
Quivering against the blanched blue of the marge.
I sat unbonneted, and my throat baked,
And my tongue loll'd dogwise. Red sand below,
And one unlidded eye above—mere God
Blazing from marge to marge. I did not pray;
My heart was as a cinder in my breast,
And with both hands I held my head which throbbed.
I who had sought for God, had followed God
Through the fair world which stings with sharp desire
For him of whom its hints and whisperings are,
Its gleams and tingling moments of the night,
I, who in flower, and wave, and mountain wind,
And song of bird, and man's diviner heart
Had owned the present Deity, yet strove
For naked access to his inmost shrine,—
Now found God doubtless, for he filled the heaven
Like brass, he breathed upon the air like fire."

By his title, *La Révélation Par le Désert*, he meant to suggest his model; but we must study Dowden's art in other forms to know the true subtlety of his mind, when it produced, out of his own experience, a lyric intended only for the elect:

" Song that is pent in me,
Song that is aching,
Ne'er to escape from me,
Sleeping or waking,

" Down aspic! the dust of me,
Blown the world over
A century hence
Will envenom a lover.

" His red lips grow vocal,
His great word is new,
And the world knows my secret,
Is dreaming of you."

Twenty years ago, when Professor Dowden was in his prime, and living in the Appian Way—not at Rome, but Dublin—it was my good fortune to visit him there on the winter nights when he kept open house. A hospitable recollection, and the aroma of that pleasant memory can be shared by any one who hears him discourse on poetry and a favourite poet in this book of his ripest experience.

E. R.

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PREFACE

AN attempt is made in this volume to tell the story of Browning's fe, including, as part of it, a notice of his books, which may be egarded as the chief of "his acts and all that he did." I have ried to keep my reader in constant contact with Browning's nind and art, and thus a sense of the growth and development f his genius ought to form itself before the close.

The materials accessible for a biography, apart from Browning's published writings, are not copious. He destroyed nany letters; many, no doubt, are in private hands. For ome parts of his life I have been able to add little to what Mrs. rr tells. But since her biography of Browning was published good deal of interesting matter has appeared. The publica- on of "The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett rowning" has enabled me to construct a short, close-knit arrative of the incidents that led up to Browning's marriage. rom that date until the death of Mrs. Browning her "Letters," dited by Mr. Kenyon, has been my chief source. My method as not been that of quotation, but the substance of many tters is fused, as far as was possible, into a brief, continuous ory. Two privately issued volumes of Browning's letters, dited by Mr. T. J. Wise, and Mr. Wise's "Browning Biblio- aphy" have been of service to me. Mr. Gosse's "Robert rowning, Personalia," Mrs Ritchie's "Tennyson, Ruskin and rowning," the "Life of Tennyson" by his son, Mr Henry mes's volumes on W. W. Story, letters of Dante Rossetti, the ary of Mr. W. M. Rossetti, with other writings of his, memoirs, miniscences or autobiographies of Lady Martin, F. T. Palgrave, wett, Sir James Paget, Gavan Duffy, Robert Buchanan, dolf Lehmann, W. J. Stillman, T. A. Trollope, Miss F. P. bbe, Miss Swanwick, and others have been consulted. And veral interesting articles in periodicals, in particular Mrs. thur Bronson's articles "Browning in Venice" and "Brown- g in Asolo," have contributed to my narrative. For some formation about Browning's father and mother, and his nnection with York Street Independent Chapel, I am in-

debted to Mr. F. Herbert Stead, Warden of "The Robert Browning Settlement," Walworth. I thank Messrs Smith, Elder and Co., as representing Mr. R. Barrett Browning, for permission to make such quotations as I have ventured to make from copyright letters.

My study of Browning's poems is chronological. I recognise the disadvantages of this method, but I also perceive certain advantages. Many years ago in "Studies in Literature" I attempted a general view of Browning's work, and wrote, as long ago as 1867, a careful study of *Sordello*. What I now write may suffer as well as gain from a familiarity of so many years with his writings. But to make them visible objects to me I have tried to put his poems outside myself, and approach them with a fresh mind. Whether I have failed or partly succeeded I am unable to determine.

The analysis of *La Saisiaz* appeared—substantially—in the little Magazine of the Home Reading Union, and one or two other short passages are recovered from uncollected articles of mine. I have incorporated in my criticism a short passage from one of my wife's articles on Browning in *The Dark Blue Magazine*, making such modifications as suited my purpose, and she has contributed a passage to the pages which close this volume.

I had the privilege of some personal acquaintance with Browning, and have several cordial letters of his addressed to my wife and to myself. These I have not thought it right to use.

E. D.

Chapter I

Childhood and Youth

THE ancestry of Robert Browning has been traced[1] o an earlier Robert who lived in the service of Mr ohn Bankes of Corfe Castle, and died in 1746. His dest son, Thomas, "was granted a lease for three ves of the little inn, in the little hamlet of East Voodyates and parish of Pentridge, nine miles south-est of Salisbury on the road to Exeter." Robert, orn in 1749, the son of this Thomas, and grand-ther of the poet, became a clerk in the Bank of ngland, and rose to be principal in the Bank Stock ffice. At the age of twenty-nine he married Margaret ittle, a lady born in the West Indies and possessed West Indian property. He is described by Mrs rr as an able, energetic, and worldly man. He lived ntil his grandson was twenty-one years old. His rst wife was the mother of another Robert, the poet's ther, born in 1781. When the boy had reached the ge of seven he lost his mother, and five years later s father married again. This younger Robert when youth desired to become an artist, but such a career as denied to him. He longed for a University ducation, and, through the influence of his step-other, this also was refused. They shipped the oung man to St Kitts, purposing that he should

[1] By Dr Furnivall; see *The Academy*, April 12, 1902.

oversee the West Indian estate. There, as Browning on the authority of his mother told Miss Barrett "he conceived such a hatred to the slave-system . . that he relinquished every prospect, supported himself while there in some other capacity, and came back while yet a boy, to his father's profound astonishment and rage."[1] At the age of twenty-two he obtained a clerkship in the Bank of England, an employment which, his son says, he always detested. Eight years later he married Sarah Anna, daughter of William Wiedemann, a Dundee shipowner, who was the son of a German merchant of Hamburg. The young man's father, on hearing that his son was a suitor to Miss Wiedemann, had waited benevolently on her uncle "to assure him that his niece would be thrown away on a man so evidently born to be hanged." In 1811 the new-married pair settled in Camberwell and there in a house in Southampton Street Robert Browning—an only son—was born on May 7, 1812. Two years later (Jan. 7, 1814) his sister, Sarah Anna—an only daughter—known in later years as Sarianna, a form adopted by her father, was born. She survived her brother, dying in Venice on the morning of April 22, 1903.[3]

Robert Browning's father and mother were persons who for their own sakes deserve to be remembered. His father, while efficient in his work in the Bank

[1] "Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.," ii. 477.

[2] Letter of R. B. to E. B. B.

[3] Dr Moncure Conway states that Browning told him that the original name of the family was De Buri. According to Mrs Orr, Browning "neither claimed nor disclaimed the more remote genealogical past which had presented itself as a certainty to some older members of his family."

as a wide and exact reader of literature, classical as ell as modern. We are told by Mrs Orr of his ractice of soothing his little boy to sleep "by hum- ning to him an ode of Anacreon," and by Dr Moncure onway that he was versed in mediæval legend, and eemed to have known Paracelsus, Faustus, and even almudic personages with an intimate familiarity. He wrote verses in excellent couplets of the ghteenth century manner, and strung together ntastic rhymes as a mode of aiding his boy in sks which tried the memory. He was a dexterous raughtsman, and of his amateur handiwork in por- aiture and caricature—sometimes produced, as it ere, instinctively, with a result that was unforeseen —much remains to prove his keen eye and his skill ith the pencil. Besides the curious books which he gerly collected, he also gathered together many rints—those of Hogarth especially, and in early states. e had a singular interest, such as may also be seen the author of *The Ring and the Book*, in investigat- g and elucidating complex criminal cases.[1] He was lover of athletic sports and never knew ill-health. or the accumulation of riches he had no talent and o desire, but he had a simple wealth of affection hich he bestowed generously on his children and his iends. "My father," wrote Browning, "is tender- earted to a fault. . . . To all women and children e is chivalrous." "He had," writes Mr W. J. Stillman, no knew Browning's father in Paris in his elder ears, "the perpetual juvenility of a blessed child. If live in the world as if not of it indicates a saintly

[1] Quoted by Mr Sharp in his "Life of Browning," p. 21, *n.*, from Mrs aser Cockran.

nature, then Robert Browning the elder was a saint a serene, untroubled soul, conscious of no moral o theological problem to disturb his serenity, and a gentle as a gentle woman ; a man in whom, it seeme to me, no moral conflict could ever have arisen t cloud his frank acceptance of life, as he found it com to him. . . . His unworldliness had not a flaw."[1] T Dante Rossetti he appeared, as an old man, "lovabl beyond description," with that "submissive yet highl cheerful simplicity of character which often . . appears in the family of a great man, who uses a last what the others have kept for him." He i Rossetti continues, "a complete oddity—with a rea genius for drawing—but caring for nothing in th least except Dutch boors,—fancy, the father c Browning !—and as innocent as a child." Brownin himself declared that he had not one artistic taste i common with his father—"in pictures, he goes 'soul away' to Brauwer, Ostade, Teniers . . . he would tur from the Sistine Altar-piece to these—in music h desiderates a tune 'that has a story connected wit it.'" Yet Browning inherited much from his fathe and was ready to acknowledge his gains. In *Develop ment*, one of the poems of his last volume, he recall his father's sportive way of teaching him at five year old, with the aid of piled-up chairs and tables—th cat for Helen, and Towzer and Tray as the Atreida —the story of the siege of Troy, and, later, his urgin the boy to read the tale "properly told" in the trans lation of Homer by his favourite poet, Pope. H lived almost to the close of his eighty-fifth year, an if he was at times bewildered by his son's poetry, h

[1] "Autobiography of a Journalist," i. 277.

came nearer to it in intelligent sympathy as he grew older, and he had for long the satisfaction of enjoying his son's fame.

The attachment of Robert Browning to his mother—"the true type of a Scottish gentlewoman," said Carlyle—was deep and intimate. For him she was, in his own phrase, "a divine woman"; her death in 1849 was to Browning almost an overwhelming blow. She was of a nature finely and delicately strung. Her nervous temperament seems to have been transmitted—robust as he was in many ways—to her son. The love of music, which her Scottish-German father possessed in a high degree, leaping over a generation, reappeared in Robert Browning. His capacity for intimate friendships with animals—spider and toad and lizard—was surely an inheritance from his mother. Mr Stillman received from Browning's sister an account of her mother's unusual power over both wild creatures and household pets. "She could lure the butterflies in the garden to her," which reminds us of Browning's whistling for lizards at Asolo. A fierce bull-dog intractable to all others, to her was docile and obedient. In her domestic ways she was gentle yet energetic. Her piety was deep and pure. Her husband had been in his earlier years a member of the Anglican communion; she was brought up in the Scottish kirk. Before her marriage she became a member of the Independent congregation, meeting for worship at York Street, Lock's Fields, Walworth, where now stands the Robert Browning Hall. Her husband attached himself to the same congregation; both were teachers in the Sunday School. Mrs Browning kept, until within a few years of her death,

a missionary box for contributions to the London Missionary Society. The conditions of membership implied the acceptance of "those views of doctrinal truth which for the sake of distinction are called Calvinistic." Thus over the poet's childhood and youth a religious influence presided; it was not sacerdotal, nor was it ascetic; the boy was in those early days, as he himself declared, "passionately religious." Their excellent pastor was an entirely "unimaginative preacher of the Georgian era," who held fast by the approved method of "three heads and a conclusion." Browning's indifference to the ministrations of Mr Clayton was not concealed, and on one occasion he received a rebuke in the presence of the congregation. Yet the spirit of religion which surrounded and penetrated him was to remain with him, under all its modifications, to the end. "His face," wrote the Rev. Edward White, "is vividly present to my memory through the sixty years that have intervened. It was the most wonderful face in the whole congregation—pale, somewhat mysterious, and shaded with black, flowing hair, but a face whose expression you remember through a life-time. Scarcely less memorable were the countenances of his father, mother and sister."[1]

Robert Browning, writes Mrs Orr, "was a handsome, vigorous, fearless child, and soon developed an unresting activity and a fiery temper." His energy of mind made him a swift learner. After the elementary lessons in reading had been achieved, he was

[1] For my quotations and much of the above information I am indebted to Mr F. Herbert Stead, Warden of the Robert Browning Settlement, Walworth. In Robert Browning Hall are preserved the baptismal registers of Robert (June 14th, 1812), and Sarah Anna Browning, with other documents from which I have quoted.

prepared for the neighbouring school of the Rev. Thomas Ready by Mr Ready's sisters. Having entered this school as a day-boarder, he remained under Mr Ready's care until the year 1826. To facile companionship with his school-fellows Browning was not prone, but he found among them one or two abiding friends. As for the rest, though he was no winner of school prizes, he seems to have acquired a certain intellectual mastery over his comrades; some of them were formed into a dramatic *troupe* for the performance of his boyish plays. Perhaps the better part of his education was that of his hours at home. He read widely in his father's excellent library. The favourite books of his earliest years, Croxall's *Fables* and Quarles's *Emblems*, were succeeded by others which made a substantial contribution to his mind. A list given by Mrs Orr includes Walpole's *Letters*, Junius, Voltaire, and Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*. The first book he ever bought with his own money was Macpherson's *Ossian*, and the first composition he committed to paper, written years before his purchase of the volume, was an imitation of Ossian, "whom," says Browning, "I had not read, but conceived, through two or three scraps in other books." His early feeling for art was nourished by visits to the Dulwich Gallery, to which he obtained an entrance when far under the age permitted by the rules; there he would sit for an hour before some chosen picture, and in later years he could recall the "wonderful Rembrandt of Jacob's vision," the Giorgione music-lesson, the "triumphant Murillo pictures," "such a Watteau," and "all the Poussins."[1]

[1] *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, i. 528, 529; and (for Ossian), ii. 469.

Among modern poets Byron at first with him held the chief place. Boyish verses, written under the Byronic influence, were gathered into a group when the writer was but twelve years old; a title—*Incondita*—was found, and Browning's parents had serious intentions of publishing the manuscript. Happily the manuscript, declined by publishers, was in the end destroyed, and editors have been saved from the necessity of printing or reprinting these crudities of a great poet's childhood. Their only merit, he assured Mr Gosse, lay in "their mellifluous smoothness." It was an event of capital importance in the history of Browning's mind when—probably in his thirteenth year—he lighted, in exploring a book-stall, upon a copy of one of the pirated editions of Shelley's *Queen Mab* and other poems. Through the zeal of his good mother on the boy's behalf the authorised editions were at a later time obtained; and she added to her gift the works, as far as they were then in print, of Keats.[1] If ever there was a period of *Sturm und Drang* in Browning's life, it was during the years in which he caught from Shelley the spirit of the higher revolt. A new faith and unfaith came to him, radiant with colour, luminous with the brightness of dawn, and uttered with a new, keen, penetrating melody. The outward conduct of his life was obedient in all essentials to the good laws of use and wont. He pursued his various studies—literature, languages, music—with energy. He was diligent—during a brief attendance

[1] Browning in a letter to Mr Wise says that this happened "some time before 1830 (or even earlier). The books," he says, "were obtained in the *regular way*, from Hunt and Clarke." Mr Gosse in *Personalia* gives a different account, pp. 23, 24.

—in Professor Long's Greek class at University College —"a bright, handsome youth," as a classfellow has described him, "with long black hair falling over his shoulders." He sang, he danced, he rode, he boxed, he fenced. But below all these activities a restless inward current ran. For a time he became, as Mrs Orr has put it, "a professing atheist and a practising vegetarian;" and together with the growing-pains of intellectual independence there was present a certain aggressive egoism. He loved his home, yet he chafed against some of its social limitations. Of friendships outside his home we read of that with Alfred Domett, the 'Waring' of his poems, afterwards the poet and the statesman of New Zealand; with Joseph Arnould, afterwards the Indian judge; and with his cousin James Silverthorne, the 'Charles' of Browning's pathetic poem *May and Death*. We hear also of a tender boyish sentiment, settling into friendship, for Miss Eliza Flower, his senior by nine years, for whose musical compositions he had an ardent admiration: "I put it apart from all other English music I know," he wrote as late as 1845, "and fully believe in it as *the* music we all waited for." With her sister Sarah, two years younger than Eliza, best known by her married name Sarah Flower Adams and remembered by her hymn, written in 1840, "Nearer my God to Thee," he discussed as a boy his religious difficulties, and in proposing his own doubts drew forth her latent scepticism as to the orthodox beliefs. "It was in answering Robert Browning," she wrote, "that my mind refused to bring forward argument, turned recreant, and sided with the enemy." Something of this period of Browning's *Sturm und Drang*

can be divined through the ideas and imagery of *Pauline*.[1]

The finer influence of Shelley upon the genius of Browning in his youth proceeded from something quite other than those doctrinaire abstractions—the formulas of revolution—which Shelley had caught up from Godwin and certain French thinkers of the eighteenth century. Browning's spirit from first to last was one which was constantly reaching upward through the attainments of earth to something that lay beyond them. A climbing spirit, such as his, seemed to perceive in Shelley a spirit that not only climbed but soared. He could in those early days have addressed to Shelley words written later, and suggested, one cannot but believe, by his feeling for his wife:

> You must be just before, in fine,
> See and make me see, for your part,
> New depths of the Divine!

Shelley opened up for his young and enthusiastic follower new vistas leading towards the infinite, towards the unattainable Best. Browning's only piece of prose criticism—apart from scattered comments in his letters—is the essay introductory to that volume of letters erroneously ascribed to Shelley, which was published when Browning was but little under forty years old. It expresses his mature feelings and convictions; and these doubtless contain within them as their germ the experience of his youth.[2] Shelley

[1] The quotations from letters above are taken from J. C. Hadden's article "Some Friends of Browning" in *Macmillan's Magazine*, Jan. 1898.

[2] Later in life Browning came to think unfavourably of Shelley as a man and to esteem him less highly as a poet. He wrote in December 1885 to Dr Furnivall: "For myself I painfully contrast my notions of

appears to him as a poet gifted with a fuller perception of nature and man than that of the average mind, and striving to embody the thing he perceives "not so much with reference to the many below, as to the One above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth—an ultimate view ever aspired to, if but partially attained, by the poet's own soul." If Shelley was deficient in some subordinate powers which support and reinforce the purely poetic gifts, he possessed the highest faculty and in this he lived and had his being. "His spirit invariably saw and spoke from the last height to which it had attained." What was "his noblest and predominating characteristic" as a poet? Browning attempts to give it definition: it was "his simultaneous perception of Power and Love in the absolute, and of Beauty and Good in the concrete, while he throws, from his poet's station between both, swifter, subtler, and more numerous films for the connexion of each with each, than have been thrown by any modern artificer of whom I have knowledge." In other words it was Shelley's special function to fling an aerial bridge from reality, as we commonly understand that word, to the higher reality which we name the ideal; to set up an aerial ladder—not less solid because it is aerial—upon the earth, whose top reached to heaven. Such was Browning's conception of Shelley, and it pays little regard either to atheistic theory or vegetarian practice.

A time came when Robert Browning must make choice of a future career. His interests in life were

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Shelley the *man* and Shelley, well, even the *poet*, with what they were sixty years ago." He declined Dr Furnivall's invitation to him to accept the presidency of "The Shelley Society."

manifold, but in some form or another art was the predominant interest. His father remembered his own early inclinations, and how they had been thwarted; he recognised the rare gifts of his son, and he resolved that he should not be immured in the office of a bank. Should he plead at the bar? Should he paint? Should he be a maker of music, as he at one time desired, and for music he always possessed an exceptional talent? When his father spoke to him, Robert Browning knew that his sister was not dependent on any effort of his to provide the means of living. "He appealed," writes Mr Gosse, "to his father, whether it would not be better for him to see life in the best sense, and cultivate the powers of his mind, than to shackle himself in the very outset of his career by a laborious training, foreign to that aim. . . . So great was the confidence of the father in the genius of his son that the former at once acquiesced in the proposal." It was decided that he should take to what an old woman of the lake district, speaking of "Mr Wudsworth," described as "the poetry business." The believing father was even prepared to invest some capital in the concern. At his expense *Paracelsus*, *Sordello*, and *Bells and Pomegranates* were published.

A poet may make his entrance into literature with small or large inventions, by carving cherry-stones or carving a colossus. Browning, the creator of men and women, the fashioner of minds, would be a sculptor of figures more than life-size rather than an exquisite jeweller; the attempt at a Perseus of this Cellini was to precede his brooches and buttons. He planned, Mr Gosse tells us, "a series of monodramatic epics, narratives of the life of typical souls." In a

modification of this vast scheme *Paracelsus*, which ncludes more speakers than one, and *Sordello*, which s not dramatic in form, find their places. They were receded by *Pauline*, in the strictest sense a mono- rama, a poem not less large in conception than either f the others, though this "fragment of a confession" s wrought out on a more contracted scale.

Pauline, published without the writer's name—his unt Silverthorne bearing the cost of publication—vas issued from the press in January 1833.[1] Brown- ng had not yet completed his twenty-first year. When including it among his poetical works in 1867, e declared that he did so with extreme repugnance nd solely with a view to anticipate unauthorised epublication of what was no more than a "crude preliminary sketch," entirely lacking in good draughts- manship and right handling. For the edition of wenty years later, 1888, he revised and corrected *Pauline* without re-handling it to any considerable xtent. In truth *Pauline* is a poem from which Browning ought not to have desired to detach his nature self. Rarely does a poem by a writer so young deserve better to be read for its own sake. It is an in- eresting document in the history of its author's mind. t gives promises and pledges which were redeemed n full. It shows what dropped away from the poet nd what, being an essential part of his equipment, vas retained. It exhibits his artistic method in the process of formation. It sets forth certain leading houghts which are dominant in his later work. The irst considerable production of a great writer must

[1] Even the publishers—Saunders and Otley—did not know the author's ame.—"Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.," i. 403.

always claim attention from the student of his mind and art.

The poem is a study in what Browning in his *Fifine* terms "mental analysis"; it attempts to shadow forth, through the fluctuating moods of the dying man, a series of spiritual states. The psychology is sometimes crude; subtle, but clumsily subtle; it is, however, essentially the writer's own. To construe clearly the states of mind which are adumbrated rather than depicted is difficult, for Browning had not yet learnt to manifest his generalised conceptions through concrete details, to plunge his abstractions in reality. The speaker in the poem tells us that he "rudely shaped his life to his immediate wants"; this is intelligible, yet only vaguely intelligible, for we do not know what were these wants, and we do not see any rude shaping of his life. We are told of "deeds for which remorse were vain"; what were these deeds? did he, like Bunyan, play cat on Sunday, or join the ringers of the church bells? "Instance, instance," we cry impatiently. And so the story remains half a shadow. The poem is dramatic, yet, like so much of Browning's work, it is not pure drama coming from profound sympathy with a spirit other than the writer's own; it is only hybrid drama, in which the *dramatis persona* thinks and moves and acts under the necessity of expounding certain ideas of the poet. Browning's puppets are indeed too often in his earlier poems moved by intellectual wires; the hands are the hands of Luria or Djabal, but the voice is the showman's voice. A certain intemperance in the pursuit of poetic beauty, strange and lovely imagery which obscures rather than interprets, may be regarded as in *Pauline* the

ault or the glory of youth; a young heir arrived at is inheritance will scatter gold pieces. The verse as caught something of its affluent flow, its wavelike areer, wave advancing upon wave, from Shelley:

> 'Tis he, I ken the manner of his gait;
> He rises on the toe; that spirit of his
> In aspiration lifts him from the earth.

The aspiration in Browning's later verse is a complex of many forces; here it is a simple poetic enthusiasm.

By virtue of its central theme *Pauline* is closely related to the poems which at no great distance followed—*Paracelsus* and *Sordello*. Each is a study of the flaws which bring genius to all but ruin, a study of the erroneous conduct of life by men of extraordinary powers. In each poem the chief personage aspires and fails, yet rises—for Browning was not of the temper to accept ultimate failures, and postulated a heaven to warrant his optimistic creed—rises at the close from failure to a spiritual recovery, which may be regarded as attainment, but an attainment, as far as earth and its uses are concerned, marred and piteous; he recovers in the end his true direction, but recovers it only for service in worlds other than ours which he may hereafter traverse. He has been seduced or conquered by alien forces and through some inward flaw; he has been faithless to his highest faculties; he has not fulfilled his seeming destiny; yet before death and the darkness of death arrive, light has come; he perceives the wanderings of the way, and in one supreme hour or in one shining moment he gives indefeasible pledges of the loyalty which he has forfeited. Shelley in *Alastor*, the

influence of which on Browning in writing *Pauline* is evident, had rebuked the idealist within himself, who would live in lofty abstractions to the loss of human sympathy and human love. Browning in *Pauline* also recognises this danger, but he indicates others—the risk of the lower faculties of the mind encroaching upon and even displacing the higher, the risk of the spirit of aggrandisement, even in the world of the imagination, obtaining the mastery over the spirit of surrender to that which is higher than self. It is quite right and needful to speak of the "lesson" of Browning's poem, and the lesson of *Pauline* is designed to inculcate first loyalty to a man's highest power, and secondly a worshipping loyalty and service to that which transcends himself, named by the speaker in *Pauline* by the old and simple name of God.

Was it the problem of his own life—that concerning the conduct of high, intellectual and spiritual powers—which Browning transferred to his art, creating personages other than himself to be exponents of his theme? We cannot tell; but the problem in varied forms persists from poem to poem. The poet imagined as twenty years of age, who makes his fragment of a confession in *Pauline*, is more than a poet; he is rather of the Sordello type than of the type represented in Eglamor and Aprile.[1] Through his imagination he would comprehend and possess all forms of life, of beauty, of joy in nature and in humanity; but he must also feel himself at the centre of these, the lord and master of his own perceptions and creations; and yet,

[1] "V. A. xx," following the quotation from Cornelius Agrippa means "Vixi annos xx," *i.e.* "the imaginary subject of the poem was of that age."—Browning to Mr T. J. Wise.

t the same time, this man is made for the worship nd service of a power higher than self. How is such nature as this to attain its true ends? What are ts special dangers? If he content himself with the xercise of the subordinate faculties, intellectual exterity, wit, social charm and mastery, he is lost; f he should place himself at the summit, and cease o worship and to love, he is lost. He cannot alter is own nature; he cannot ever renounce his intense onsciousness of self, nor even the claim of self to a ertain supremacy as the centre of its own sympathies nd imaginings. So much is inevitable, and is right But if he be true to his calling as poet, he will task is noblest faculty, will live in it, and none the less ook upward, in love, in humility, in the spirit of loyal ervice, in the spirit of glad aspiration, to that Power vhich leans above him and has set him his earthly ask.

Such reduced to a colourless and abstract statement s the theme dealt with in *Pauline*. The young poet, vho, through a fading autumn evening, lies upon his eath-bed, has been faithless to his high calling, and et never wholly faithless. As the pallid light declines, e studies his own soul, he reviews his past, he traces is wanderings from the way, and all has become clear. He has failed for the uses of earth; but he recognises n himself capacities and desires for which no adequate cope could ever have been found in this life; and estored to the spirit of love, of trust, by such love, uch trust as he can give Pauline, he cannot deny the vitnessing audible within his own heart to a future ife which may redeem the balance of his temporal oss. The thought which plays so large a part in

Browning's later poetry is already present and potent here.

Two incidents in the history of a soul—studied by the speaker under the wavering lights of his hectic malady and fluctuating moods of passion—are dealt with in a singularly interesting and original way. He describes, with strange and beautiful imagery, the cynical, bitter pleasure—few of us do not know it—which the intellectual faculties sometimes derive from mocking and drawing down to their own level the spiritual powers, the intuitive powers, which are higher than they, higher, yet less capable of justification or verification by the common tests of sense and understanding. The witchcraft of the brain degrades the god in us:

> And then I was a young witch whose blue eyes,
> As she stood naked by the river springs,
> Drew down a god: I watched his radiant form
> Growing less radiant, and it gladdened me.

What he presents with such intensity of imaginative power Browning must have known—even if it were but for moments—by experience. And again, there is impressive truth and originality in the description of the state of the poet's mind which succeeded the wreck of his early faith and early hopes inspired by the voice of Shelley—the revolutionary faith in liberty equality and human perfectibility. Wordsworth in *The Prelude*—unpublished when Browning wrote *Pauline*—which is also the history of a poet's mind has described his own experience of the loss of all these shining hopes and lofty abstractions, and the temper of mind which he describes is one of moral chaos and spiritual despair. The poet of *Pauline*

turns from political and social abstractions to real life, and the touch of reality awakens him as if from a splendid dream; but his mood is not so sane as that of despair. He falls back, with a certain joy, upon the exercise of his inferior powers; he wakes suddenly and "without heart-wreck":

> First went my hopes of perfecting mankind,
> Next—faith in them, and then in freedom's self
> And virtue's self, then my own motives, ends,
> And aims and loves, and human love went last.
> I felt this no decay, because new powers
> Rose as old feelings left—wit, mockery,
> Light-heartedness; for I had oft been sad,
> Mistrusting my resolves, but now I cast
> Hope joyously away; I laughed and said
> "No more of this!"

It is difficult to believe that Browning is wholly dramatic here; we seem to discover something of that period of *Sturm und Drang*, when his mood grew restless and aggressive. The homage paid to Shelley, whose higher influence Browning already perceived to be in large measure independent of his creed of revolution, has in it certainly something of the spirit of autobiography. In this enthusiastic admiration for Shelley there is nothing to regret, except the unhappy extravagance of the name "Suntreader," which he invented as a title for the poet of *Alastor* and *Prometheus Unbound*.

The attention of Mr W. J. Fox, a Unitarian minister of note, had been directed to Browning's early unpublished verse by Miss Flower. In the *Monthly Repository* (April 1833) which he then edited, Mr Fox wrote of *Pauline* with admiration, and Browning was duly grateful for this earliest public

recognition of his genius as a poet. In the *Athenæum* Allen Cunningham made an effort to be appreciative and sympathetic. John Stuart Mill desired to be the reviewer of *Pauline* in *Tait's Magazine*; there, however, the poem had been already dismissed with one contemptuous phrase. It found few readers, but the admiration of one of these, who discovered *Pauline* many years later, was a sufficient compensation for the general indifference or neglect. "When Mr Browning was living in Florence, he received a letter from a young painter whose name was quite unknown to him, asking him whether he were the author of a poem called *Pauline*, which was somewhat in his manner, and which the writer had so greatly admired that he had transcribed the whole of it in the British Museum reading-room. The letter was signed D. G. Rossetti, and thus began Mr Browning's acquaintance with this eminent man."[1]

[1] Edmund Gosse: "Robert Browning Personalia," pp. 31, 32. Mr W. M. Rossetti in "D. G. Rossetti, his Family Letters," i. 115, gives the summer of 1850 as the date of his brother's letter; and says, no doubt correctly, that Browning was in Venice at the time. Mr Sharp prints a letter of Browning's on his early acquaintance with Rossetti, and on the incident recorded above. I may here note that "Richmond," appended, with a date, to *Pauline*, was a fancy or a blind; Browning never resided at Richmond.

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Chapter II

Paracelsus and Sordello

HERE is little of incident in Browning's life to be corded for the period between the publication of *uline* and the publication of *Paracelsus*. During e winter of 1833-1834 he spent three months in ussia, "nominally," says Mrs Orr, "in the character secretary" to the Russian consul-general, Mr Benck-usen. Memories of the endless pine-forests through nich he was driven on the way to St Petersburg may ve contributed long afterwards to descriptive passages *Ivàn Ivànovitch*.

In 1842 or 1843 he wrote a drama in five acts to nich was given the name "Only a Player-girl"; the anuscript lay for long in his portfolio and never saw e light. "It was Russian," he tells Miss Barrett, nd about a fair on the Neva, and booths and oshkies and fish-pies and so forth, with the Palaces the background."[1] Late in life, at Venice, Browning came acquainted with an old Russian, Prince agarin, with whom he competed successfully for an ur in recalling folk-songs and national airs of Russia

[1] The supposition of Mr Sharp and Mr Gosse that Browning visited ly after having seen St Petersburg is an error. His first visit to Italy s that of 1838. I may note here that in a letter to E. B. B. (vol. ii. 3) Browning refers to having been in Holland some ten years since; date of his letter is August 18, 1846.

caught up during the visit of 1833-34. "His memory
said Gagarin, "is better than my own, on which I hav
hitherto piqued myself not a little."[1] Perhaps it wa
his wanderings abroad that made Browning at th
time desire further wanderings. He thought of
diplomatic career, and felt some regret when he faile
to obtain an appointment for which he had applied i
connection with a mission to Persia.

In the winter of 1834 Browning was at work o
Paracelsus, which, after disappointments with othe
houses, was accepted, on terms that secured the publishe
from risk, by Effingham Wilson, and appeared befor
midsummer of the following year. The subject ha
been suggested by Count Amédée de Ripert-Moncla
a young French royalist, engaged in secret service o
behalf of the dethroned Bourbons. To him the poe
is dedicated. For a befitting treatment of the stor
of Paracelsus special studies were necessary, an
Browning entered into these with zeal, taking in h
poem—as he himself believed—only trifling liberti
with the matter of history. In solitary midnight walk
he meditated his theme and its development. "Ther
was, in particular," Mr Sharp tells us, "a wood nea
Dulwich, whither he was wont to go." Mr Sharp add
that at this time Browning composed much in th
open air, and that "the glow of distant London" a
night, with the thought of its multitudinous huma
life, was an inspiring influence. The sea which spok
to Browning with most expressive utterances wa
always the sea of humanity.

In its combination of thought with passion, an

[1] Mrs Bronson; Browning in Venice, *Cornhill Magazine*, Feb. 190
pp. 160, 161.

ot less in its expression of a certain premature orldly wisdom, *Paracelsus* is an extraordinary output mind made by a writer who, when his work was complished, had not completed his twenty-third year. he poem is the history of a great spirit, who has ught lofty and unattainable ends, who has fallen on the way and is bruised and broken, but who es at the close above his ruined self, and wrings t of defeat a pledge of ultimate victory. In a eface to the first edition, a preface afterwards itted, Browning claims originality, or at least velty, for his artistic method; "instead of having course to an external machinery of incidents to eate and evolve the crisis I desire to produce, I ave ventured to display somewhat minutely the mood self in its rise and progress, and have suffered the gency by which it is influenced and determined, to e generally discernible in its effects alone, and subdinate throughout, if not altogether excluded." The oem, though dramatic, is not a drama, and canons hich are applicable to a piece intended for stage-epresentation would here—Browning pleads—be ather a hindrance than a help. Perhaps Browning egarded the action which can be exhibited on the tage as something external to the soul, and imagined hat the naked spirit can be viewed more intimately han the spirit clothed in deed and in circumstance. f this was so, his conceptions were somewhat crude; ith the true dramatic poet action is the hieroglyph f the soul, and many a secret may be revealed in this anguage, amassing as it does large meanings into one uminous symbol, which cannot be set forth in an laborate intellectual analysis. We think to probe

the depths, and perhaps never get far below the surface. But the flash and outbreak of a fiery spirit amid a tangle of circumstance, springs to the surface from the very centre, and reveals its inmost energies.

Paracelsus, as presented in the poem, is a man of pre-eminent genius, passionate intellect, and inordinate intellectual ambition. If it is meant that he should be the type of the modern man of science, Browning has missed his mark, for Paracelsus is in fact almost as much the poet as the man of science; but it is true that the cautious habits of the inductive student of nature were rare among the enthusiastic speculators of Renaissance days, and the Italian successor of Paracelsus—Giordano Bruno—was in reality, in large measure, what Browning has here conceived and exhibited. Paracelsus is a great revolutionary spirit in an epoch of intellectual revolution; it is as much his task to destroy as to build up; he has broken with the past, and gazes with wild-eyed hopes into the future, expecting the era of intellectual liberty to dawn suddenly with the year One, and seeing in himself the protagonist of revolution. Such men as Paracelsus, whether their sphere be in the political, the religious, or the intellectual world, are men of faith; a task has been laid on each of them; a summons, a divine mandate, has been heard. But is the summons authentic? is the mandate indeed divine? In the quiet garden at Würzburg, while the autumn sun sinks behind St Saviour's spire, Festus —the faithful Horatio to this Hamlet of science—puts his questions and raises his doubts first as to the end and aim of Paracelsus, his aspiration towards absolute knowledge, and secondly, as to the means proposed

or its attainment—means which reject the service of l predecessors in the paths of knowledge; which epart so widely from the methods of his contempor-ries; which seek for truth through strange and casual evelations; which leave so much to chance. Very obly has Browning represented the overmastering orce of that faith which genius has in itself, and hich indeed is needed to sustain it in the struggle ith an incredulous or indifferent world. The end self is justified by the mandate of God; and as for he means, truth is not to be found only or chiefly by athering up stray fragments from without; (truth es buried within the soul, as jewels in the mine, and he chances and changes and shocks of life are re-uired to open a passage for the shining forth of this nner light.) Festus is overpowered less by reason han by the passion of faith in his younger and greater ellow-student; and the gentle Michal is won from her rophetic fears half by her affectionate loyalty to the han, half by the glow and inspiration of one who eems to be a surer prophet than her mistrusting self. And in truth the summons to Paracelsus is authentic; e is to be a torch-bearer in the race. His errors are is own, errors of the egoism of genius in an age of ntellectual revolution; he casts away the past, and hat is not wise, that is not legitimate; he anticipates or himself the full attainment of knowledge, which elongs not to him but to humanity during revolving enturies; and although he sets before himself the ervice of man as the outcome of all his labours—and his is well—at the same time he detaches himself rom his fellow-men, regards them from a regal height, would decline even their tribute of gratitude, and

would be the lofty benefactor rather than the loving helpmate of his brethren. Is it meant then that Paracelsus ought to have contented himself with being like his teacher Trithemius and the common masters of the schools? No, for these rested with an easy self-satisfaction in their poor attainments, and he is called upon to press forward, and advance from strength to strength, through attainment or through failure to renewed and unending endeavour. His dissatisfaction, his failure is a better thing than their success and content in that success. But why should he hope in his own person to forestall the slow advance of humanity, and why should the service of the brain be alienated from the service of the heart?

There are many ways in which Browning could have brought Paracelsus to a discovery of his error. He might have learnt from his own experience the aridity of a life which is barren of love. Some moment of supreme pity might have come to him in which he, the possessor of knowledge, might have longed to offer consolation to some suffering fellow and have found the helplessness of knowledge to console. Browning's imagination as a romantic poet craved a romantic incident and a romantic *mise-en-scène*. In the house of the Greek conjuror at Constantinople Paracelsus, now worn by his nine years' wanderings with all their stress and strain, his hair already streaked with grey, his spirit somewhat embittered by the small success attending a vast effort, his moral nature already somewhat deteriorated and touched with the cynicism of experience and partial failure, shall encounter the strange figure of Aprile, the living wraith of a poet who has also failed, who "would love

finitely and be loved," and who in gazing upon the
ıd has neglected all the means of attainment; and
ɔm him, or rather by a reflex ray from this Aprile,
s own error shall be flashed on the consciousness
the foiled seeker for knowledge. The invention
Browning is certainly not lacking in the quality of
rangeness in beauty; yet some readers will perhaps
ıare the feeling that it strains, without convincing,
ıe imagination. As we read the first speeches
ldressed by the moon-struck poet to the wandering
udent of science, and read the moon-struck replies,
ɔtwithstanding the singular beauty of certain dramatic
nd lyrical passages, we are inclined to ask—Is this,
deed, a conjuror's house at Constantinople, or one
Browning's "mad-house cells?" and from what
elusions are the harmless, and the apparently
ıngerous, lunatic suffering? The lover here is
ɔpified in the artist; but the artist may be as
ıughtily isolated from true human love as the
.an of science, and the fellowship with his kind which
aracelsus needs can be poorly learnt from such a
istracted creature as Aprile. It is indeed Aprile's
xample and the fate which has overtaken him rather
ıan his wild words which startle Paracelsus into a
cognition of his own error. But the knowledge
ıat he has left love out of his scheme of life is no
ıarantee that he will ever acquire the fervour and
ıe infinite patience of love. The whole scene, with
s extravagant poetic beauties and high-pitched
ıetoric, leaves a painful impression of unreality, not
the shallower but in the deepest sense of that
ɔrd.

For a poet to depict a poet in poetry is a hazardous

experiment; in regarding one's own trade a sens of humour and a little wholesome cynicism are nc amiss. These could find no place in Browning' presentation of Aprile, but it is certain that Brownin himself was a much more complex person than the dyin lover of love who became the instructor of Paracelsu When the scene shifts from Constantinople to Basi and the illustrious Professor holds converse with Festu by the blazing logs deep into the night, and at lengt morning arises "clouded, wintry, desolate and cold, we listen with unflagging attention and entire imagina tive conviction; and, when silence ensues, a wonde comes upon us as to where a young man of three-and twenty acquired this knowledge of the various bitte tastes of life which belong to maturer experience, an how he had mastered such precocious worldly wisdom Paracelsus,

> The wondrous Paracelsus, life's dispenser,
> Fate's commissary, idol of the schools
> And courts,

chews upon his worldly success and extracts its acri juices. This is not the romantic melancholy of youth which dreams of infinite things, but the pain of manhood which feels the limitations of life, which can laugh a the mockery of attainment, which is sensible of th shame that dwells at the heart of glory, yet whic already has begun to hanker after the mean delight of the world, and cannot dispense with the sorr pleasures of self-degradation. The kind, calm Pasto of Einsiedeln sees at first only the splendour tha hangs around the name of his early comrade, th hero of his hopes. And Paracelsus for a while woul forbear with tender ruth to shatter his friend's illusion

would veil, if that were possible, the canker which has eaten into his own heart. But in the tumult of old glad memories and present griefs, it ceases to be possible; from amid the crew of foolish praisers he must find one friend having the fidelity of genuine insight; he must confess his failure, and once for all correct the prophecy of Michal that success would come and with it wretchedness—

> I have not been successful, and yet am
> Most miserable; 'tis said at last.

A certain manly protectiveness towards Festus and Michal, with their happy Aennchen and Aureole in the quiet home at Einsiedeln, remains to Paracelsus; there is in it now more than a touch of "the devotion to something afar from the sphere of our sorrow."

When, driven from Basil as a quack amid the hootings of the crowd, Paracelsus once again "aspires"; but it is from a lower level, with energy less certain, and with a more turbid passion. Upon such soiled and draggled wings can he ever soar again? His strength is the strength of fever; his gaiety is wild and bitter; he urges his brain with artificial stimulants. And he, whose need was love, has learnt hatred and scorn. In his earlier quest for truth he had parted with youth and joy; he had grown grey-haired and lean-handed before the time. Now, in his new scheme of life, he will not sever truth from enjoyment; he will snatch at the meanest delights; before death comes, something at least shall thus be gained. And yet he has almost lost the capacity for pleasures apart from those of a wolfish hunger for knowledge; and he despises his baser aims

and his extravagant speeches. Could life only be begun anew with temperate hopes and sane aspirings! But he has given his pledges and will abide by them; he must submit to be hunted by the gods to the end. Before he parts from Festus at the Alsatian inn, a softer mood overtakes him. Blinded by his own passion, Paracelsus has had no sense to divine the sorrow of his friend, and Festus has had no heart to obtrude such a sorrow as this. Only at the last moment, and in all gentleness, it must be told—Michal is dead. In Browning's earliest poem Pauline is no more than a name and a shadow. The creator of Ottima and Colombe, of Balaustion and Pompilia had much to tell of womanhood. Michal occupies, as is right, but a small space in the history of Paracelsus, yet her presence in the poem and her silent withdrawal have a poignant influence. We see her as maiden and hear of her as mother, her face still wearing that quiet and peculiar light

> Like the dim circlet floating round a pearl.

And now, as the strong men of Shakespeare's play spoke of the dead Portia in the tent, Paracelsus and Festus talk of the pastor of Einsiedeln's gentle wife. Festus speaks in assured hope, Paracelsus in daring surmise, of a life beyond the grave, and finally with a bitter return upon himself from his sense of her tranquillity in death:

> And Michal sleeps among the roots and dews,
> While I am moved at Basil, and full of schemes
> For Nuremberg, and hoping and despairing,
> As though it mattered how the farce plays out,
> So it be quickly played!

t is the last cry of his distempered egoism before the losing scene.

In the dim and narrow cell of the Hospital of St Sebastian, where he lies dying, Paracelsus at last "attains"—attains something higher than a Professor's chair at Basil, attains a rapture, not to be expressed, in the joy which draws him onward, and a lucid comprehension of the past that lies behind. All night the faithful Festus has watched beside the bed; the mind of the dying man is working as the sea works after a tempest, and strange wrecks of memory float past in troubled visions. In the dawning light the clouds roll away, a great calm comes upon his spirit, and he recognises his friend. It is laid upon him, before he departs, to declare the meaning of his life. This life of his had been no farce or failure; in his degree he has served mankind, and what is the service of man but the true praise of God? He perceives now the errors of the way; he had been dazzled by knowledge and the power conferred by knowledge; he had not understood God's plan of gradual evolution through the ages; he had laboured for his race in pride rather than in love; he had been maddened by the intellectual infirmities, the moral imperfections of men, whereas he ought to have recognised even in these the capacities of a creature in progress to a higher development. Now, at length, he can follow in thought the great circle of God's creative energy, ever welling forth from Him in vast undulations, ever tending to return to Him again, which return Godwards is already foretold in the nature of man by august anticipations, by strange gleams of splendour, by dares and fears not bounded by this our earth.

Were *Paracelsus* a poem of late instead of early origin in Browning's poetical career, we should probably have received no such open prophecy as this. The scholar of the Renaissance, half-genius half-charlatan, would have casuistically defended or apologised for his errors, and through the wreathing mists of sophistry would have shot forth ever and anon some ray of truth.

We receive from *Paracelsus* an impression of the affluence of youth. There is no husbanding of resources, and perhaps too little reserve of power. Where the poet most abandons himself to his ardour of thought and imagination he achieves his highest work. The stress and tension of his enthusiasm are perhaps too continuous, too seldom relieved by spaces of repose. It is all too much of a Mazeppa ride; there are times when we pray for a good quarter of an hour of comfortable dulness, or at least of wholesome bovine placidity. The laws of such a poem are wholly determined from within. The only question we have a right to ask is this—Has the poet adequately dealt with his subject, adequately expressed his idea? The division of the whole into five parts may seem to have some correspondency with the five acts of a tragedy; but here the stage is one of the mind, and the acts are free to contract or to expand themselves as the gale of thought or passion rises or subsides. If a spiritual anemometer were invented it would be found that the wind which drives through the poem maintains often and for long an astonishing pace. The strangely beautiful lyric passages interspersed through the speeches are really of a slower movement than the dramatic body of the poem; they are, by comparison

esting-places. The perfumed closet of the song of Paracelsus in Part IV. is "vowed to quiet" (did Browning ever compose another romanza as lulling as his?), and the Maine glides so gently in the lyric of Festus (Part V.) that its murmuring serves to bring back sanity to the distracted spirit of the dying Aureole. There are youthful excesses in *Paracelsus*; some vague, rhetorical grandeurs; some self-conscious sublimities which ought to have been oblivious of self; some errors of over-emphasis; some extravagances of imagery and of expression. The wonderful passage which describes "spring-wind, as a dancing psaltress," passing over the earth, is marred by the presence of "young volcanoes"

"cyclops-like
Staring together with their eyes on flame,"

which young volcanoes were surely the offspring of the "young earthquake" of Byron. But these are, as the French phrase has it, defects of the poem's qualities. A few pieces of base metal are flung abroad unawares together with the lavish gold.

A companion poem to *Paracelsus*—so described by Browning to Leigh Hunt—was conceived by the poet soon after the appearance of the volume of 1835. When *Strafford* was published two years later, we learn from a preface, afterwards omitted, that he had been engaged on *Sordello*. Browning desired to complete his studies for this poem of Italy among the scenes which it describes. The manuscript was with him in Italy during his visit of 1838; but the work was not to be hastily completed. *Sordello* was published in 1840, five years after *Paracelsus*. In the chronological order of Browning's poems, by virtue of the

date of origin, it lies close to the earlier companion piece; in the logical order it is the completion of a group of poems—*Pauline*, *Paracelsus*, *Sordello*—which treat of the perplexities, the trials, the failures, the ultimate recovery of men endowed with extraordinary powers; it is one more study of the conduct of genius amid the dangers and temptations of life. Here we may rightly disregard the order of publication, and postpone the record of external incidents in Browning's poetical development, in order to place *Sordello* in its true position, side by side with *Paracelsus*.

How the subject of *Sordello* was suggested to Browning we do not know; the study of Dante may have led him to a re-creation of the story of Dante's predecessor; after having occupied in imagination the old towns of Germany and Switzerland—Würzburg and Basil, Colmar and Salzburg—he may have longed for the warmth and colour of Italy; after the Renaissance with its revolutionary speculations, he may have wished to trace his way back to the Middle Age when men lived and moved under the shadow of one or the other of two dominant powers, apparently fixed in everlasting rivalry—the Emperor and the Pope.

"The historical decoration," wrote Browning, in the dedicatory letter of 1863, to his friend Milsand, "was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study." Undoubtedly the history of a soul is central in the poem; but the drawings of Italian landscape, so sure in outline, so vivid in colour; the views of old Italian city life, rich in the tumult of townsfolk, military chieftains, men-at-arms; the pictures of sombre interiors

nd southern gardens, the hillside castle amid its vines, he court of love with its contending minstrels, the nidnight camp lit by its fires; and, added to these, he Titianesque portraits of portly magnifico and gold-aired maiden, and thought-worn statist make up an nvironment which has no inconsiderable poetic value f its own, feeding, as it does, the inner eye with arious forms and dyes, and leaving the "spirit in ense" more wealthy. With a theme so remote from he common consciousness of his own day, Browning onceived that there would be an advantage in being is own commentator and interpreter, and hence he hose the narrative in preference to the dramatic form; nus, he supposed he could act the showman and stand side at times, to expound his own intentions. Unappily, in endeavouring to strengthen and concentrate is style, he lost that sense of the reader's distance rom himself which an artist can never without risk orget; in abbreviating his speech his utterance nickened; he created new difficulties by a legeremain in the construction of sentences; he assumed n his public an alertness of intelligence equal to his wn. When it needs a leaping-pole to pass from ubject to verb across the chasm of a parenthesis, when reader swings himself dubiously from relative to ome one of three possible antecedents, when he springs a meaning through the fissure of an undeveloped xclamatory phrase, and when these efforts are deanded again and again, some muscular fatigue naturly ensues. Yet it is true that when once the right onnections in these perplexing sentences have been stablished, the sense is flashed upon the mind with ngular vividness; then the difficulty has ceased to

exist. And thus, in two successive stages of study the same reader may justly censure *Sordello* for its obscurity of style, and justly applaud it for a remarkable lucidity in swiftness. Intelligent, however, as Browning was, it implied a curious lack of intelligence to suppose that a poem of many thousand lines written in shorthand would speedily find decipherers. If we may trust the words of Westland Marston, recorded by Mr W. M. Rossetti in *The Preraphaelite Brotherhood Journal* (26 February 1850), Browning imagined that his shorthand was Roman type of unusual clearness: "Marston says that Browning, before publishing *Sordello*, sent it to him to read, saying that this time the public should not accuse him at anyrate of being unintelligible." What follows in the *Journal* is of interest, but can hardly be taken as true to the letter: "Browning's system of composition is to write down on a slate, in prose, what he wants to say, and then turn it into verse, striving after the greatest amount of condensation possible; thus, if an exclamation will suggest his meaning, he substitutes this for a whole sentence." In climbing an antique tower we may obtain striking flashes of prospect through the slits and eyelet-holes which dimly illuminate the winding stair, but to combine these into an intelligible landscape is not always easy. Browning's errors of style are in part attributable to his unhappy application of a passage in a letter of Caroline Fox which a friend had shown him. She stated that her acquaintance John Sterling had been repelled by the "verbosity" of *Paracelsus*: "Doth Mr Browning know," she asked, "that Wordsworth will devote a fortnight or more to the discovery of a single word that is the one fit for

his sonnet?"[1] Browning was determined to avoid 'verbosity"; but the method which seems to have occurred to him was that of omitting many needful though seemingly insignificant words, and jamming together the words that gleam and sparkle; with the result that the mind is at once dazzled and fatigued.

Sordello, the Italian singer of the thirteenth century, is conceived by Browning as of the type which he had already presented in the speaker of *Pauline*, only that here the poet is not infirm in will, and, though loved by Palma, he is hardly a lover. Like the speaker of *Pauline* he is preoccupied with an intense self-consciousness, the centre of his own imaginative creations, and claiming supremacy over these. He craves some means of impressing himself upon the world, some means of deploying the power that lies coiled within him, not through any gross passion for rule but in order that he may thus manifest himself to himself at the full. He is as far as possible removed from that type of the worshipping spirit exhibited in Aprile, and in the poet Eglamor, whom Sordello foils and subdues in the contest of song. The fame as a singer which comes suddenly to him draws Sordello out of his Goito solitude to the worldly society of Mantua, and his experiences of disillusion and half voluntary self-degradation are those which had been faintly shadowed forth in *Pauline*, and exhibited more fully—and yet with a difference—in the Basil experiences of Paracelsus. Like the poet of *Pauline*, after his immersion in worldliness, Sordello again seeks solitude, and recovers a portion of his higher self; but solitude cannot content one who is unable to obtain the self-manifestation which

[1] Mrs Orr's "Handbook to Browning," pp. 10, 11.

his nature demands without the aid of others who may furnish an external body for the forces that lie suppressed within him. Suddenly and unexpectedly the prospect of a political career opens before him. May it not be that he will thus obtain what he needs, and find in the people the instrument of his own thoughts, his passions, his aspirations, his imaginings, his will? May not the people become the body in which his spirit, with all its forces, shall incarnate itself? Coming into actual acquaintance with the people for the first time, the sight of their multiform miseries, their sorrows, even their baseness lays hold of Sordello; it seems as if it were they who were about to make *him* their instrument, the voice through which their inarticulate griefs should find expression; he is captured by those whom he thought to capture. By all his personal connections he is of the Imperial party—a Ghibellin; but, studying the position of affairs, he becomes convinced that the cause of the Pope is one with the cause of the people. At this moment vast possibilities of political power suddenly widen upon his view; Sordello, the minstrel, a poor archer's son, is discovered to be in truth the only son of the great Ghibellin chieftain, Salinguerra; he is loved by Palma, who, with her youth and beauty brings him eminent station, authority, and a passion of devoted ambition on his behalf; his father flings upon Sordello's neck the baldric which constitutes him the Emperor's representative in Northern Italy. The heart and brain of Sordello become the field of conflict between fierce, contending forces. All that is egoistic in his nature cries out for a life of pride and power and joy. At best it is but little that he could

ever do to serve the suffering multitude. And yet should he falter because he cannot gain for them the results of time? Is it not his part to take the single step in their service, though it can be no more than a step? In the excitement of this supreme hour of inward strife Sordello dies; but he dies a victor; like Paracelsus he also has "attained"; the Imperial baldric is found cast below the dead singer's feet.

This, in brief, is the "history of a soul" which Browning has imagined in his *Sordello*. And the conclusion of the whole matter can be briefly stated: the primary need of such a nature as Sordello's—and we can hardly doubt that Browning would have assigned himself a place in the class to which the poet of his imagination belongs—is that of a Power above himself, which shall deliver him from egoism, and whose loyal service shall concentrate and direct his various faculties, and this a Power not unknown or remote, but one brought near and made manifest; or, in other words, it is the need of that which old religion has set forth as God in Christ. Sordello in his final decision in favour of true service to the people had, like Paracelsus, given his best praise to God, had given his highest pledge of loyalty to whatever is Divine in life. And therefore, though he has failed in all his high designs, his failure is in the end a success. He, like Paracelsus, had read that bitter sentence which declares that "collective man outstrips the individual":—

> "God has conceded two sights to a man—
> One, of men's whole work, time's completed plan,
> The other, of the minute's work, man's first
> Step to the plan's completion."

And the poor minute's work assigned him by the divine law of justice and pity he accepts as his whole life's task. It is true that though he now clearly sees the end, he has not perhaps recognised the means. If Sordello contemplated political action as his mode of effecting that minute's work, he must soon have discovered, were his life prolonged, that not thus can a poet live in his highest faculty, or render his worthiest service. The poet—and speaking in his own person Browning makes confession of his faith—can adequately serve his mistress, "Suffering Humanity," only as a poet. Sordello failed to render into song the highest thoughts and aspirations of Italy; but Dante was to follow and was not to fail. The minstrel's last act—his renunciation of selfish power and pleasure, his devotion to what he held to be the cause of the people, the cause of humanity, was indeed his best piece of poetry; by virtue of that act Sordello was not a beaten man but a conqueror.

These prolonged studies—*Paracelsus*, *Sordello*, and, on a more contracted scale, *Pauline*—each a study in "the development of a soul," gain and lose through the immaturity of the writer. He had, as yet, brought only certain of his faculties into play, or, at least, he had not as yet connected with his art certain faculties which become essential characteristics of his later work. There is no humour in these early poems, or (since Naddo and the critic tribe of *Sordello* came to qualify the assertion) but little; there is no wise casuistry, in which falsehood is used as the vehicle of truth; the psychology, however involved it may seem, is really too simple; the central personages are too abstract—knowledge and love and volition do not exhaust the

soul; action and thought are not here incorporated one with the other; a deed is not the interpreter of an idea; an idea is first exhibited by the poet and the deed is afterwards set forth as its consequence; the conclusions are too patently didactic or doctrinaire; we suspect that they have been motives determining the action; our scepticism as to the disinterested conduct of the story is aroused by its too plainly deduced moral. We catch the powers at play which ought to be invisible; we fiddle with the works of the clock till it ceases to strike. Yet if only a part of Browning's mind is alive in these early poems, the faculties brought into exercise are the less impeded by one another; the love of beauty is not tripped up by a delight in the grotesque. And there is a certain pleasure in attending to prophecy which has not learnt to hide itself in casuistry. The analysis of a state of mind, pursued in *Sordello* with an effort that is sometimes fatiguing and not always successful, is presently followed by a superb portrait—like that of Salinguerra—painted by the artist, not the analyst, and so admirable is it that in our infirmity we are tempted to believe that the process of flaying and dissection alters the person of a man or woman as Swift has said, considerably for the worse.

Chapter III

The Maker of Plays

THE publication of *Paracelsus* did not gain for Browning a large audience, but it brought him friends and acquaintances who gave his life a delightful expansion in its social relations. John Forster, the critic, biographer and historian, then unknown to him, reviewed the poem in the *Examiner* with full recognition of its power and promise. Browning gratefully commemorated a lifelong friendship with Forster, nearly a score of years later, in the dedication of the 1863 edition of his poetical works. Mrs Orr recites the names of Carlyle, Talfourd, R. Hengist Horne, Leigh Hunt, Procter, Monckton Milnes, Dickens, Wordsworth, Landor, among those of distinguished persons who became known to Browning at this period.[1] His "simple and enthusiastic manner" is referred to by the actor Macready in his diary; "he looks and speaks more like a youthful poet than any man I ever saw." Browning's face was one of rare intelligence and full of changing expression. He was not tall, but in early years he was slight, was graceful in his movements,

[1] Dr Moncure Conway in "The Nation" vol. ii. (an article written on the occasion of Browning's death) says that he was told by Carlyle of his first meeting with Browning—as Carlyle rode upon Wimbledon Common a "beautiful youth," walking there alone, stopped him and asked for his acquaintance. The incident has a somewhat legendary air.

and held his head high. His dark brown hair hung in wavy masses upon his neck. His voice had in early manhood a quality, afterwards lost, which Mr Sharp describes as "flute-like, clear, sweet and resonant." Slim, dark, and very handsome are the words chosen by Mrs Bridell-Fox to characterise the youthful Browning as he reappeared to her memory; "And—may I hint it?"—she adds, "just a trifle of a dandy, addicted to lemon-coloured kid gloves and such things, quite 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form.' But full of ambition, eager for success, eager for fame, and, what is more, determined to conquer fame and to achieve success." Yet the correct and conventional Browning could also fire up for lawlessness—"frenetic to be free." He was hail-fellow well-met, we are told—but is this part of a Browning legend?—with tramps and gipsies, and he wandered gladly, whether through devout sympathy or curiosity of mood we know not, into Little Bethels and other tents of spiritual Ishmael.

From Camberwell Browning's father moved to a house at Hatcham, transporting thither his long rows of books, together with those many volumes which lay still unwritten in the "celle fantastyk" of his son. 'There is a vast view from our greatest hill," wrote Browning; a vast view, though Wordsworth had scorned the Londoner's hill—"Hill? *we* call that, such as that, a *rise*." Here he read and wrote, enjoyed his rides on the good horse "York," and cultivated friendship with a toad in the pleasant garden, for he had a peculiar interest, as his poems show, in creatures that live a shy, mysterious life apart from that of man, and the claim of beauty, as commonly understood, was not needed to win his regard. Browning's eye was an

instrument made for exact and minute records of natural phenomena. "I have heard him say," Mr Sharp writes, "that at that time"—speaking of his earlier years—"his faculty of observation would not have appeared despicable to a Seminole or an Iroquois." Such activity of the visual nerve differs widely from the wise passiveness or brooding power of the Wordsworthian mode of contemplation. Browning's life was never that of a recluse who finds in nature and communion with the anima mundi a counterpoise to the attractions of human society. Society fatigued him, yet he would not abandon its excitements. A mystic —though why it should be so is hard to say—does not ordinarily affect lemon-coloured kid gloves, as did the Browning of Mrs Bridell-Fox's recollection. The mysticism of Browning's temper of mind came not by withdrawal from the throng of positive facts, but by pushing through these to the light beyond them, or by the perception of some spear-like shaft of light piercing the denseness, which was serviceable as the sheathe or foil. And of course it was among men and women that he found suggestions for some of his most original studies.

An introduction to Macready which took place at Mr Fox's house towards the close of November 1835 was fruitful in consequences. A month later Browning was Macready's guest at Elstree, the actor's resting-place in the country. His fellow-traveller, then unknown to him, in the coach from London was John Forster ; in Macready's drawing-room the poet and his critic first formed a personal acquaintance. Browning had for long been much interested in the stage, but only as a spectator. His imagination now

turned towards dramatic authorship with a view to theatrical performance. A play on a subject from later Roman history, *Narses*, was thought of and was cast aside. The success of Talfourd's *Ion*, after the first performance of which (May 26, 1836) Browning supped in the author's rooms with Macready, Wordsworth, and Landor, probably raised high hopes of a like or a greater success for some future drama of his own. "Write a play, Browning," said Macready, as they left the house, "and keep me from going to America." "Shall it be historical or English?" Browning questioned, as the incident is related by Mrs Orr, "What do you say to a drama on Strafford?" The life of Strafford by his friend Forster, just published, which during an illness of the author had been revised in manuscript by Browning, probably determined the choice of a subject.

By August the poet had pledged himself to achieve this first dramatic adventure. The play was produced at Covent Garden on May 1st, 1837, by Macready, who himself took the part of Strafford. Helen Faucit, then a novice on the stage, gave an adequate rendering of the difficult part of Lady Carlisle. For the rest, the complexion of the piece, as Browning describes it, after one of the latest rehearsals, was "perfect gallows." Great historical personages were presented by actors who strutted or slouched, who whimpered or drawled. The finanical distress at Covent Garden forbade any splendour or even dignity of scenery or of costumes.[1] The text was considerably altered—and

[1] Lady Martin (Helen Faucit), however, wrote in 1891 to Mrs Ritchie: "The play was mounted in all matters with great care . . . minute attention to accuracy of costume prevailed. . . . The scenery was alike accurate."

not always judiciously—from that of the printed play, which had appeared before its production on the stage. Yet on the first night *Strafford* was not damned, and on the second it was warmly applauded.[1] After the fifth performance the wretched Pym refused to save his mother England even once more, and the play was withdrawn. Browning declared to his friends that never again, as long as he might live, would he write a play. Whining not being to his taste, he averted his eyes and set himself resolutely to work upon *Sordello*.

"I sail this morning for Venice," Browning wrote to a friend on Good Friday, 1838. He voyaged as sole passenger on a merchantman, and soon was on friendliest terms with the rough kindly captain. For the first fortnight the sea was stormy and Browning suffered much; as they passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, Captain Davidson aided him to reach the deck, and a pulsing of home-pride—not home-sickness—gave their origin to the patriotic lines beginning, "Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the north-west died away." Under the bulwark of the *Norham Castle*, off the African coast, when the fancy of a gallop on his Uncle Reuben's horse suddenly presented itself in pleasant contrast with the tedium of the hours on shipboard, he wrote in pencil, on the flyleaf of Bartoli's Simboli, that most spirited of poems which tell of the glory of motion—*How they brought the good news from Ghent to Aix*. The only adventure

[1] On which occasion Browning—muffled up in a cloak—was asked by a stranger in the pit whether he was not the author of "Romeo and Juliet" and "Othello." "No, so far as I am aware," replied Browning. Two burlesques of Shakespeare by a Mr Brown or Brownley were in course of performance in London. *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, ii. 132.

of the voyage was the discovery of an Algerine pirate ship floating keel uppermost; it righted suddenly under the stress of ropes from the *Norham Castle*, and the ghastly and intolerable dead—Algerines and Spaniards—could not scare the British sailors eager for loot; at last the battered hulk was cast loose, and its blackness was seen reeling slowly off "into the most gorgeous and lavish sunset in the world." Having visited Venice, Vicenza and Padua—cities and mountain solitudes, which gave their warmth and colour to his unfinished poem—Browning returned home by way of Tyrol, the Rhine, Liège and Antwerp. It was his first visit to Italy and was a time of enchantment. Fifty years later he recalled the memories of these early days when his delight had something insubstantial, magical in it, and the vision was half perceived with the eye and half projected from within:—

> How many a year my Asolo,
> Since—one step just from sea to land—
> I found you, loved yet feared you so—
> For natural objects seemed to stand
> Palpably fire-clothed![1]

Of evenings soon after his return to London Mrs Bridell-Fox writes: "He was full of enthusiasm for Venice, that Queen of Cities. He used to illustrate his glowing descriptions of its beauties, the palaces, the sunsets, the moonrises, by a most original kind of etching. Taking up a bit of stray notepaper, he would hold it over a lighted candle, moving the paper about gently till it was cloudily smoked over, and then utilising the darker smears for clouds, shadows,

[1] From the Prologue to *Asolando*, Browning's last volume.

water, or what not, would etch with a dry pen the forms of lights on cloud and palace, on bridge or gondola on the vague and dreamy surface he had produced." The anticipations of genius had already produced a finer etching than any of these, in those lines of marvellous swiftness and intensity in *Paracelsus*, which describe Constantinople at the hour of sunset.

The publication of *Sordello* (1840) did not improve Browning's position with the public. The poem was a challenge to the understanding of an aspirant reader, and the challenge met with no response. An excuse for not reading a poem of five or six thousand lines is grateful to so infirm and shortlived a being as man. And, indeed, a prophet, if prudent, may do well to postpone the privilege of being unintelligible until he has secured a considerable number of disciples of both sexes. The reception of *Sordello* might have disheartened a poet of less vigorous will than Browning; he merely marched breast forward, and let *Sordello* lie inert, until a new generation of readers had arisen. The dramas, *King Victor and King Charles* and *The Return of the Druses* (at first named "Mansoor the Hierophant") now occupied his thoughts. Short lyrical pieces were growing under his hand, and began to form a considerable group. And one fortunate day as he strolled alone in the Dulwich wood—his chosen resort of meditation—"the image flashed upon him of one walking thus alone through life; one apparently too obscure to leave a trace of his or her passage, yet exercising a lasting though unconscious influence at every step of it."[1] In other

[1] Mrs Orr, "Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning," p. 54 (1st ed.).

ords Pippa had suddenly passed her poet in the ood.

A cheap mode of issuing his works now in manuript was suggested to Browning by the publisher oxon. They might appear in successive pamphlets, ach of a single sheet printed in double-column, and ne series might be discontinued at any time if the ublic ceased to care for it. The general title *Bells nd Pomegranates* was chosen; "beneath upon the em of the robe thou shalt make pomegranates of lue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the em thereof; and bells of gold between them round bout." Browning, as he explained to his readers the last number, meant to indicate by the title, Something like an alternation, or mixture, of music ith discoursing, sound with sense, poetry with nought"—such having been, in fact, one of the ost familiar of the Rabbinical interpretations designed expound the symbolism of this priestly decoration rescribed in "Exodus." From 1841 to 1846 the umbers of *Bells and Pomegranates* successively ppeared; with the eighth the series closed. The rst number—*Pippa Passes*—was sold for sixpence; hen *King Victor and King Charles* was published in ne following year (1842), the price was raised to one hilling. The third and the seventh numbers were ade up of short pieces—*Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845). *The Return f the Druses* and *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*—Numbers and 5—followed each other in the same year 1843. *olombe's Birthday*—the only number which is known survive in manuscript—came next in order (1844). he last to appear was that which included *Luria*,

Browning's favourite among his dramas, and *A Soul's Tragedy*.[1] His sister, except in the instance of *Colomb* was Browning's amanuensis. On each title-page he named Robert Browning "Author of Paracelsus"— the "wholly unintelligible" *Sordello* being passed ove Talfourd, "Barry Cornwall," and John Kenyon (th cousin of Elizabeth Barrett) were honoured wit dedications. In these pamphlets of Moxon, Browning wonderful apples of gold were certainly not presente to the public in pictures or baskets of silver; yet th possessor of the eight parts in their yellow pap wrappers may now be congratulated. Only one the numbers—*A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*—attained th distinction of a second edition, and this probab because the drama as published was helped to comparative popularity by its representation on th stage.

This tragedy of young love and death was writte hastily—in four or five days—for Macready. Brownin while at work on his play, as we learn from a letter Dante Rossetti to Allingham, was kept indoors by slight indisposition; his father on going to see hi "was each day received boisterously and cheerful with the words: 'I have done another act, father.' Forster read the tragedy aloud from the manuscript f Dickens, who wrote of it with unmeasured enthusias in a letter, known to Browning only when print after the lapse of some thirty years: "Browning's pl has thrown me into a perfect passion of sorrow. . I know no love like it, no passion like it, no mouldi

[1] *A Soul's Tragedy* was written in 1843 or 1844, and revised immediat before publication. See Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., i. 474.

[2] Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham, p. 168.

a splendid thing after its conception like it." Things ad gone ill with Macready at Drury Lane, and when e time for *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* drew near it is ident that he feared further losses and would gladly ve been released from his promise to produce the ay; but Browning failed to divine the true state of fairs. The tragedy was read to the company by a otesque, wooden-legged and red-nosed prompter, and was greeted with laughter. To make amends, acready himself undertook to read it aloud, but he eclared himself unable, in the disturbed state of his ind, to appear before the public: his part—that of ord Tresham—must be taken by Phelps. From cer- in rehearsals Phelps was unavoidably absent through ness. Macready who read his lines on these occasions, ow was caught by the play, and saw possibilities the part of Tresham which fired his imagination. e chose, almost at the last moment, to displace his ounger and less distinguished colleague. Browning, n the other hand, insisted that Phelps, having been signed the part, should retain it. To baffle Macready his design of presenting the play to the public in a utilated form, Browning, aided by his publisher, ad the whole printed in four-and-twenty hours.[1] A pture of the long-standing friendship with Macready llowed, nor did author and actor meet again until ter the great sorrow of Browning's life. "Mr acready too"—writes Mrs Orr—"had recently lost s wife, and Mr Browning could only start forward,

[1] The above statement is substantially that of Browning; but on certain ints his memory misled him. Whoever is interested in the matter ould consult Professor Lounsbury's valuable article "A Philistine View a Browning Play" in *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1899, where estions are raised and some corrections are ingeniously made.

grasp the hand of his old friend, and in a voice choke with emotion say, 'O Macready!'"

The tragedy was produced at Drury Lane o February 11th, 1843, with Phelps, who acted admi ably as Tresham, and Helen Faucit as Mildre Although it had been ill rehearsed and not a shillin had been spent on scenery or dresses, it was receive with applause. To a call for the author, Browning, seate in his box, declined to make any response. Thu not without some soreness of heart, closed his dire connection with the theatre. He heard with pleasur when in Italy that *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* was give by Phelps at Sadler's Wells Theatre in Novembe 1848, and with unquestionable success. A renderin of *Colombe's Birthday* was projected by Charles Kea in 1844, but the long delays, which were inevitabl could not be endured by Browning, who desired t print his play forthwith among the *Bells and Pom granates*. It was not until nine years later that thi play, a veritable "All for love, or the world well lost, was presented at the Haymarket, Helen Faucit appea ing as the Duchess. Soon after *Colombe's Birthda* had been published, Browning sailed once more, i the autumn of 1844, for Italy.[1] As he journeye northwards and homewards, from Naples (where the were performing an opera named *Sordello*) and Rom he sought and obtained at Leghorn an interview wit Trelawny, the generous-hearted friend of Shelley, b whose grave he had lately stood.[2]

[1] An uncle seems to have accompanied him. See *Letters of R. B. a E. B. B.*, i. 57: and (for Shelley's Grave) i. 292; for "Sordello" Naples, i., 349.

[2] In later years no friendship existed between the two. We read in M W. M. Rossetti's Diary for 1869, "4th July. . . . I see Browning dislik

Browning's work as a playwright, consisting of eight
eces, or nine if we include the later *In a Balcony*, is
fficiently ample to enable us to form a trustworthy
timate of his genius as seen in drama. Dramatic, in
e sense that he created and studied minds and
arts other than his own, he pre-eminently was; if he
sired to set forth or to vindicate his most intimate
eas or impulses, he effected this indirectly, by de-
ching them from his own personality and giving
em a brain and a heart other than his own in which
live and move and have their being. There is a
nd of dramatic art which we may term static, and
nother kind which we may term dynamic. The
rmer deals especially with characters in position, the
tter with characters in movement.[1] Passion and
ought may be exhibited and interpreted by dramatic
enius of either type; to represent passion and thought
nd action—action incarnating and developing thought
nd passion—the dynamic power is required. And by
tion we are to understand not merely a visible deed,
t also a word, a feeling, an idea which has in it a direct
erative force. The dramatic genius of Browning was
the main of the static kind; it studies with extra-
dinary skill and subtlety character in position; it
tains only an imperfect or a laboured success with
aracter in movement. The *dramatis personæ* are
ady at almost every moment, except the culminating
oments of passion, to fall away from action into
flection and self-analysis. The play of mind upon

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elawny quite as much as Trelawny dislikes him (which is not a little.)"
ssetti Papers, p. 401.

[1] See Mr R. Holt Hutton's article on Browning in "Essays Theological
d Literary."

mind he recognises of course as a matter of profoun interest and importance; but he catches the energ which spirit transfers to spirit less in the actual momer of transference than after it has arrived. Thought an emotion with him do not circulate freely through group of persons, receiving some modification fro each. He deals most successfully with each individua as a single and separate entity; each maintains his ow attitude, and as he is touched by the common influenc he proceeds to scrutinise it. Mind in these play threads its way dexterously in and out of action; is not itself sufficiently incorporated in action. Th progress of the drama is now retarded; and agai as if the author perceived that the story had falle behind or remained stationary, it is accelerated b sudden jerks. A dialogue of retrospection is a commo device at the opening of popular plays, with a vie to expound the position of affairs to the audience but a dramatic writer of genius usually works forwar through his dialogue to the end which he has se before him. With Browning for the purpose of menta analysis a dialogue of retrospection may be of highe value than one which leans and presses towards th future. The invisible is for him more important tha the visible; and so in truth it may often be; bu the highest dramatist will not choose to separate th two. The invisible is best captured and is mos securely held in the visible.

As a writer of drama, Browning, who delights t study the noblest attitudes of the soul, and to wrin a proud sense of triumph out of apparent failure, find his proper field in tragedy rather than in comedy *Colombe's Birthday* has a joyous ending, but the joy i

ery grave and earnest, and the body of the play is ade up of serious pleadings and serious hopes and ars. There is no light-hearted mirth, no real gaiety temper anywhere in the dramas of Browning. ippa's gladness in her holiday from the task of silk-inding is touched with pathos in the thought that hat is so bright is also so brief, and it is encompassed, ven within delightful Asolo, by the sins and sorrows f the world. Bluphocks, with his sniggering wit and is jingles of rhyme is a vagabond and a spy, who nly covers the shame of his nakedness with these rags f devil-may-care good spirits. The genial cynicism f Ogniben is excellent of its kind, and pleases the alate like an olive amid wines; but this man of niversal intellectual sympathies is at heart the satirist f moral illusions, the unmasker of self-deception, who vith long experience of human infirmities, has come o chuckle gently over his own skill in dealing with hem; and has he not—we may ask—wound around is own spirit some of the incurable illusions of worldly visdom? No—this is not gaiety; if Browning smiles vith his Ogniben, his smile is a comment upon the veakness and the blindness of the self-deceiver.

Browning's tragedies are tragedies without villains. The world is here the villain, which has baits and bribes and snares wherewith to entangle its victims, o lure down their mounting aspirations, to dull their vision for the things far-off and faint; perhaps also o make them prosperous and portly gentlemen, easy-going, and amiably cynical, tolerant of evil, and prudently distrustful of good. Yet truth is truth, and fact is fact; worldly wisdom is genuine wisdom after its kind; we shall be the better instructed if we

listen to its sage experience, if we listen, understan and in all justice, censure. Ogniben can blandly ar skilfully conduct a Chiappino to his valley of humili tion—"let him that standeth take heed lest he fall But what would the wisdom of Ogniben be worth i its pronouncements on a Luria or a Colombe? Perhap even in such a case not wholly valueless. The sel pleased, keen-sighted Legate might after all hav applauded a moral heroism or a high-hearted gallantr which would ill accord with his own ingenious an versatile spirit. Bishop Blougram—sleek, ecclesiastica opportunist—was not insensible to the superior merit of "rough, grand, old Martin Luther."

In Browning's nature a singularly keen, explorin intelligence was united with a rare moral and spiritua ardour, a passion for high ideals. In creating hi chief *dramatis personæ* he distributes among them wha he found within himself, and they fall into two principa groups—characters in which the predominating powe is intellect, and characters in which the mastery lie with some lofty emotion. The intellect dealing wit things that are real and positive, those persons in whon intelligence is supreme may too easily become th children of this world; in their own sphere they ar wiser than the children of light; and they are skille in a moral casuistry by which they justify to them selves the darkening of the light that is in them The passionate natures have an intelligence of thei own; they follow a gleam which is visible to them i not to others; they discover, or rather they are dis covered by, some truth which flashes forth in on inspired moment—the master-moment of a lifetime they possess the sublime certainty of love, loyalty

evotion; if they err through a heroic folly and draw
oon themselves ruin in things temporal, may there
ot be some atom of divine wisdom at the heart of
e folly, which is itself indestructible, and which
sures for them a welfare out of time and space?
rophet and casuist—Browning is both; and to each
e will endeavour to be just; but his heart must give
casting vote, and this cannot be in favour of the
suist. Every self-transcending passion has in it a
vine promise and pledge; even the passion of the
nses if it has hidden within it one spark of self-
nihilating love may be the salvation of a soul. It
Ottima, lifted above her own superb voluptuousness,
ho cries—"Not me—to him, O God, be merciful."
he region of untrammelled, unclouded passion, of
piritual intuition, and of those great words from
eaven, which pierce "even to the dividing asunder of
e joints and marrow," is, for Browning's imagination,
e East. The nations of the West—and, before all
hers, the Italian race—are those of a subtly de-
eloped intelligence. The worldly art of a Church-
an, ingenuities of theology having aided in refining
genuities of worldliness, is perhaps the finest exemplar
unalloyed western brain-craft. But Italy is also a
nd of passion; and therefore at once, for its ardours
the heart—seen not in love alone but in carven
pital and on frescoed wall—and for its casuistries
intellect, Browning looks to Italy for the material
est fitted to his artistry. Between that group of
ersonages whom we may call his characters of passion
nd that group made up of his characters of intelli-
ence, lie certain figures of peculiar interest, by birth
nd inheritance children of the East, and by culture

partakers, in a greater or a less degree, of the characte
istics of the West—a Djabal, with his Oriental hea
entangled by Frankish tricks of sophistry; a Luri
whose Moorish passion is enthralled by the fascinatio
of Florentine intellect, and who can make a retur
upon himself with a half-painful western sel
consciousness.

Loyalties, devotions, to a person, to a cause, to a
ideal, and the sacrifice of individual advantages, worldl
prosperity, temporal successes to these—such, state
in a broad and general way, is the theme of specia
interest to Browning in his dramas. These loyaltie
may be well and wisely fixed, or they may contain
portion of error and illusion. But in either case the
furnish a test of manly and womanly virtue. With
woman the test is often proposed by love—by love a
set over against ease, or high station, or the pride o
power. Colombe of Ravestein is offered on the on
hand the restoration of her forfeited Duchy, the pro
spective rank of Empress and partnership with a man
who, if he cannot give love, is yet no ignoble wooer,
man of honour, of intellect, and of high ambition; o
the other hand pleads the advocate of Cleves, a name
less provincial, past his days of youth, lean and some
what worn, and burdened with the griefs and wrong
of his townsfolk. Mere largeness in a life is some
thing, is much; but the quality of a life is more
Valence has set the cause of his fellow-citizens abov
himself; he has made the heart of the Duchess fo
the first time thrill in sympathy with the life of he
people; he has placed his loyalty to her far above hi
own hopes of happiness; he has urged his rival'
claims with unfaltering fidelity. It is not with an

ckward glances of regret, any half-doubts, prudent serves, or condescending qualifications that Colombe ves herself to the advocate of the poor. She, in her outh and beauty, has been happy during her year of lesse as play-Duchess of Juliers; she is happier now she abandons the court and, sure in her grave oice, turns with a light and joyous laugh to welcome e birthday gift of freedom and of love that has so nexpectedly come to her. Having once made her ection, Colombe can throw away the world as gaily in some girlish frolic she might toss aside a rose.

The loyalty of men, their supreme devotion and eir test may, as with women, spring from the passion love; but other tests than this are often proposed them. With King Charles of Sardinia it is duty to s people that summons him, from those modest and anquil ways of life of which he dreamed, to the cares nd toils of the crown. He has strength to accept ithout faltering the burden that is laid upon him. nd if he falters at the last, and would resign to his ther, who reclaims it, the crown which God alone ould have removed, shall we assert confidently that rowning's dramatic instinct has erred? The pity of —that his great father, daring in battle, profound in olicy, should stand before him an outraged, helpless d man, craving with senile greed a gift from his son —the pity of it revives an old weakness, an old instinct filial submission, in the heart of Charles. He has sked himself without sparing; he has gained the ffections of his subjects; he has conciliated a hostile urope; is not this enough? Or was it also in the ond that he should tread a miserable father into the ust? The test again of Luigi, in the third part of

Pippa Passes, is that of one who sees all the oppre sion of his people, who is enamoured of the antiqu ideal of liberty, and whose choice lies between a yout of luxurious ease and the virtue of one heroic crim to be followed by the scaffold-steps, with youth cu short. To him that overcometh and endureth unt the end will God give the morning-star :

> The gift of the morning-star ! Have I God's gift
> Of the morning-star ?

And Luigi will adventure forth—it may be in a kin of divine folly—as a doomsman commissioned by Go to free his Italy. The devotion of Luria to Florenc is partly of the imagination, and perhaps it is touche with something of illusion. But the actual Florenc with her astute politicians, her spies who spy upo spies, her incurable distrusts, her sinister fears, h ingrained ingratitude, is clearly exposed to him befo the end. Shall he turn the army, which is as muc his own as the sword he wields, joined with the forc of Pisa, against the beautiful, faithless city ? Or wi his passionate loyalty endure the test ? Luria with draws from life, but not until he has made ever provision for the victory of Florence over her enemy nor does he die a defeated man ; his moral greatne has subdued all envies and all distrusts ; at the clo everyone is true to him :

> The only fault's with time ;
> All men become good creatures : but so slow.[1]

Once again in Browning's earliest play, the test f the patriot Pym lies in the choice between two loyalti

[1] Luria withdraws from life "to prevent the harm Florence will do h self by striking him." *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, i. 427.

—one to England and to freedom, the other to his early iend and former comrade in politics. His faith in trafford dies hard ; but it dies ; he flings forward his opes for the grand traitor to England beyond the onfines of this life, and only the grieved unfaltering isticiary remains. Browning's Pym is a figure neither istorically true nor dramatically effective ; he is self-onscious and sentimental, a patriot armed in paste-oard rhetoric. But the writer, let us remember, was oung ; this was his first theatrical essay, and he was omewhat showy of fine intentions. The loyalty of trafford to the King is too fatuous an instinct to ain our complete sympathy. He rides gallantly into ne quicksand, knowing it to be such, and the quick-and, as certainly as the worm of Nilus, will do its kind. nd yet though this is the vain romance of loyalty, in , as Browning conceives, lies the test of Strafford. self-renouncing passion of any kind is not so common nat we can afford to look on his king-worship with corn.

Over against these devotees of the ideal Browning ets his worldlings, ranging from creatures as despic-ble as the courtiers of Duchess Colombe to such men f power and inexhaustible resource as the Nuncio ho confronts Djabal with his Druses, or the Papal egate whose easier and half-humorous task is to ismiss to his private affairs at Lugo the four-and-wentieth leader of revolt. To the same breed with ne courtiers of Colombe belong old Vane and Savile f the court of Charles. To the same breed with the Nuncio and the Legate, belongs Monsignor, who proves imself more than a match for his hireling, the scoundrel ntendant. In a happy moment Monsignor is startled

into indignant wrath; he does not exclaim with th Edmund of Shakespeare's tragedy "Some good I mea to do before I die;" but his "Gag the villain!" i a substantial contribution to the justice of our worl Under the ennobling influence of Charles and hi Polyxena, the craft of D'Ormea is uplifted to a leve of real dignity; if he cannot quite attain the positio of a martyr for the truth, he becomes something bette than one who serves God at the devil's bidding. An Braccio, plotter and betrayer, yet always with a certai fidelity towards his mother-city, is won over to th side of simple truth and righteousness by the over mastering power of Luria's magnanimity. So precious after all—Browning would say—is the mere capacity to recognise facts; if only a little grain of virtue remains in the heart, this faculty of vision may mak some sudden discovery which shall prove to a world ling that there exist facts, undeniable and of immense potency, hitherto unknown to his philosophy of chicane Browning's vote is given, as has been said, and with no uncertain voice, for his devotees of the ideal; bu the men of fine worldly brain-craft have a fascinatio for him as they have for his Eastern Luria. In Djabal at once enthusiast and impostor, Browning may seem as often afterwards, to offer an apology for the paltere with truth; but in the interests of truth itself, he desires to study the strange phenomenon of the de ceiver who would fain half-deceive himself.

Chapter IV

The Maker of Plays—(*Continued*)

HE women of the dramas, with one or two exceptions, are composed of fewer elements than the men. variety of types is presented, but each personality somewhat constrained and controlled by its idea; e free movement, the iridescence, the variety in one- ess, the incalculable multiplicity in unity, of real haracter are not always present. They admit of efinition to a degree which places them at a distance om the inexplicable open secrets of Shakespeare's eation; they lack the simple mysteriousness, the ansparent obscurity of nature. With a master-key e chambers of their souls can one after another be nlocked. Ottima is the carnal passion of woman- ood, full-blown, dazzling in the effrontery of sin, yet cluding the possibility, which Browning conceives as xisting at the extreme edge of every expansive ardour, being translated into a higher form of passion which olishes all thought of self. Anael, of *The Return of e Druses*, is pure and measureless devotion. The y of "Hakeem!" as she falls, is not an act of faith ut of love; it pierces through the shadow of the aterial falsehood to her one illuminated truth of solute love, like that other falsehood which sanctifies e dying lips of Desdemona. The sin of Mildred is e very innocence of sin, and does not really alter the

simplicity of her character; it is only the girlish rap ture of giving, with no limitation, whatever may prov a bounty to him whom she loves:—

> Come what, come will,
> You have been happy.

The remorse of Mildred is the remorse of innocenc the anguish of one wholly unlearned in the dark colou of guilt. This tragedy of Mildred and Mertoun is th *Romeo and Juliet* of Browning's cycle of dramas. Bu Mildred's cousin Guendolen, by virtue of her swif womanly penetration and her brave protectiveness c distressed girlhood, is a kinswoman of Beatrice wh supported the injured daughter of Leonato in a comed of Shakespeare which rings with laughter.

Polyxena, the Queen of Sardinia—a daughter no of Italy but of the Rhineland—is, in her degree, a eighteenth century representative of the woman of th ancient Teutonic tribes, grave, resolute, wise, and possess ing the authority of wisdom. She, whose heart and brai work bravely together like loyal comrades, is strongl but also simply, conceived as the helpmate, the coun sellor, and, in the old sense of the word, the comforte of her husband. Something of almost maternal feeling as happens at times in real life, mingles with her wifel affection for Charles, who indeed may prove on occa sions a fractious son. Like a wise guardian-angel sh remembers on these occasions that he is only a mar and that men in their unwisdom may grow impatien of unalleviated guardian-angelhood; he will by and b discover his error, and she can bide her time. Per haps, like other heroines of Browning, Polyxena is to constantly and uniformly herself; yet, no doubt, it i

ght that opaline, shifting hues should not disturb our
pression of a character whose special virtue is stead-
stness. The Queen of the English Charles, who is
ger to counsel, and always in her petulance and
ly to counsel ill, is slightly sketched; but she may
thanked for one admirable speech—her first—when
rafford, worn and fevered in the royal service, has
st arrived from Ireland, and passing out from his
terview with the King is encountered by her:—

> Is it over then?
> Why he looks yellower than ever! Well
> At least we shall not hear eternally
> Of service—services: he's paid at least.

The Lady Carlisle of the same play—a creature in
e main of Browning's imagination—had the play
en Elizabethan or Jacobean would have followed
r lord in a page's dress, have lived on half a smile
day, and perhaps have succeeded in dying languish-
gly and happily upon his sword; she is not quite
nreal, nor yet quite real; something much better than
stage property and not wholly a living woman;
ore of a Beaumont and Fletcher personage of the
ards—and as such effective—than a Shakespearian
ece of nature. The theatrical limbo to which such
most but not quite embodied shadows ultimately
oop, is capacious.

In Browning's dramatic scene of 1853, *In a Balcony*,
created with unqualified success "a very woman"
the enamoured Queen, whose heart at fifty years
ats only more wildly and desperately than a girl's.[1]
he young lovers, Constance and Norbert, are a highly

[1] *In a Balcony*, published in *Men and Women*, 1855, is said to have
en written two years previously at the Baths of Lucca.

meritorious pair, who express their passion in excellent and eloquent periods; we have seen their like before and since. But the Queen, with her unslaked thirst for the visionary wells under the palm-trees, who finds herself still amid the burning sands, is an original and tragic figure—a royal Mlle. de Lespinasse, and crowned with fiery and immitigable pain. Although she has returned the "glare" of Constance with the glare of "a panther," the Queen is large-hearted. The guards, it is true, arrive as the curtain falls; but those readers who have wasted their tender emotion on a couple of afflicted prisoners or decapitated young persons, whom mother Nature can easily replace, are mistaken. If the Queen does not die that night, she will rise next morning after sleepless hours, haggard, not fifty but eighty years old, and her passion will heroically slay itself in an act of generosity.[1] Little more, however, than a situation is represented in this dramatic scene.

Of Browning's full-length portraits of women in the

[1] I had written the above—and I leave it as I wrote it—before I noticed the following quoted from the letter of a friend by Mrs Arthur Bronson in her article Browning in Venice: "Browning seemed as full of dramatic interest in reading 'In a Balcony' as if he had just written it for our benefit. One who sat near him said that it was a natural sequence that the step of the guard should be heard coming to take Norbert to his doom, as, with a nature like the queen's, who had known only one hour of joy in her sterile life, vengeance swift and terrible would follow on the sudden destruction of her happiness. 'Now I don't quite think that,' answered Browning, as if he were following out the play as a spectator. 'The queen has a large and passionate temperament, which had only once been touched and brought into intense life. She would have died by a knife in her heart. The guard would have come to carry away her dead body.' 'But I imagine that most people interpret it as I do,' was the reply. 'Then,' said Browning, with quick interest, 'don't you think it would be well to put it in the stage directions, and have it seen that they were carrying her across the back of the stage?'"

ramas, the finest piece of work is the portrait of the appiest woman—the play-Duchess of Juliers, no onger Duchess, but ever

Our lady of dear Ravestein.

Colombe is no incarnated idea but a complete uman being, irreducible to a formula, whom we know ne better because there is always in her more of xquisite womanhood to be discovered. Even the oo fortunate Valence—all readers of his own sex nust pronounce him too fortunate—will for ever be nding her anew.

In the development of his dramatic style Browning nore and more lost sight of the theatre and its re-uirements; his stage became more and more a stage f the mind. *Strafford*, his first play, is the work of a ovice, who has little of the instinct for theatrical ffect, but who sets his brain to invent striking tableaux, o prepare surprises, to exhibit impressive attitudes, o calculate—not always successfully—the angle of speech, so that it may with due impact reach the it. The opening scene expounds the situation. In ne second Wentworth and Pym confront each other; ne King surprises them; Wentworth lets fall the and of Pym, as the stage tradition requires; as Ventworth withdraws the Queen enters to unmake hat he has made, and the scene closes with a tableau xpressing the sentimental weakness of Charles:

Come, dearest!—look, the little fairy, now
That cannot reach my shoulder! Dearest, come!

nd so proceeds the tragedy, with much that ought be dear to the average actor, which yet is somehow ot always even theatrically happy. The pathos of

the closing scene where Strafford is discovered in The Tower, sitting with his children, is theatrical pathos of the most correct kind, and each little speech of little William and little Anne is uttered as much for the audience as for their father, implying in every word "See, how we, poor innocents, heighten the pity of it." The hastily written *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* is, perhaps, of Browning's dramas the best fitted for theatrical representation. Yet it is incurably weak in the motives which determine the action; and certain passages are almost ludicrously undramatic. If Romeo before he flung up his ladder of ropes had paused, like Mertoun, to salute his mistress with a tenor morceau from the opera, it is to be feared that runaways' and other eyes would not have winked and that old Capulet would have come upon the scene in his night-gown, prepared to hasten the catastrophe with a long sword. Yet *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, with its breadth of outline, its striking situations, and its mastery of the elementary passions —love and wrath and pride and pity—gives us assurance that Browning might have taken a place of considerable distinction had he been born in an age of great dramatic poetry. If it is weak in construction so—though in a less degree—are Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, and Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*.

In *King Victor and King Charles* Browning adopted and no doubt deliberately, a plain, unfigured and uncoloured style, as suiting both the characters and the historical subject. The political background of this play and that of *Strafford* hardly entitles either drama to be named political. Browning was a student of history, but it was individuals and not society that

interested him. The affairs of England and the affairs of Sardinia serve to throw out the figures of the chief *dramatis personæ;* those affairs are not considered for their own sake. Certain social conditions are studied as they enter into and help to form an individual. The Bishop who orders his tomb at St Praxed's is in part a product of the Italian Renaissance, but the causes are seen only in their effects upon the character of a representative person. If the plain, substantial style of *King Victor and King Charles* is proper to a play with such a hero as Charles and such a heroine as Polyxena, the coloured style, rich in imagery, is no less right in *The Return of the Druses*, where religious and chivalric enthusiasm are blended with the enthusiasm of the passion of love. But already Browning was ceasing to bear in mind the conditions of the stage. Certain pages where Djabal and Khalil, Djabal and Anael, Anael and Loys are the speakers, might be described as dialogues conducted by means of "asides," and even the imagination of a reader resents a construction of scenes which requires these duets of soliloquies, these long sequences of the audible-inaudible. With the "very tragical mirth" of the second part of Chiappino's story of moral and political disaster, the spectators and the stage have wholly disappeared from Browning's theatre; the imaginary dialogue is highly dramatic, in one sense of the word, and is admirable in its kind, but we transport ourselves best to the market-place of Faenza by sitting in an easy chair.

Pippa Passes is singular in its construction; scenes detached, though not wholly disconnected, are strung pendant-wise upon the gold thread, slender but suffi-

ciently strong, of an idea; realism in art, as we now call it, hangs from a fine idealism; this substantial globe of earth with its griefs, its grossnesses, its heroism, swings suspended from the seat of God. The idea which gives unity to the whole is not a mere fantasy. The magic practised by the unconscious Pippa through her songs is of that genuine and beautiful kind which the Renaissance men of science named "Magia Naturalis." It is no fantasy but a fact that each of us influences the lives of others more or less every day, and at times in a peculiar degree, in ways of which we are not aware. Let this fact be seized with imaginative intensity, and let the imagination render it into a symbol—we catch sight of Pippa with her songs passing down the grass-paths and under the pine-wood of Asolo. Her only service to God on this one holiday of a toilsome year is to be glad. She misconceives everything that concerns "Asolo's Four Happiest Ones"—to her fancy Ottima is blessed with love, Jules is no victim of an envious trick, Luigi's content in his lot is deep and unassailable, and Monsignor is a holy and beloved priest; and, unawares to her, in modes far other than she had imagined, each of her dreams comes true; even Monsignor for one moment rises into the sacred avenger of God. Her own service, though she knows it not, is more than a mere twelve-hours' gladness; she, the little silk-winder, rays forth the influences of a heart that has the potency ascribed to gems of unflawed purity; and such influences—here embodied in the symbol of a song—are among the precious realities of our life. Nowhere in literature has the virtue of mere innocent gladness been more charm-

ingly imagined than in her morning outbreak of expectancy, half animal glee, half spiritual joy; the "whole sunrise, not to be suppressed" is a limitless splendour, but the reflected beam cast up from the splash of her ewer and dancing on her poor ceiling is the same in kind; in the shrub-house up the hill-side are great exotic blooms, but has not Pippa her one martagon lily, over which she queens it? With God all service ranks the same, and she shall serve Him all this long day by gaiety and gratitude.

Pippa Passes is a sequence of dramatic scenes, with lyrics interspersed, and placed in a lyrical setting; the figures dark or bright, of the painting are "ringed by a flowery bowery angel-brood" of song. But before his *Bells and Pomegranates* were brought to a close Browning had discovered in the short monodrama, lyrical or reflective, the most appropriate vehicle for his powers of passion and of thought. Here a single situation sufficed; characters were seen rightly in position; the action of the piece was wholly internal; a passion could be isolated, and could be either traced through its varying moods or seized in its moment of culmination; the casuistry of the brain could be studied apart,—it might have its say uninterrupted, or it might be suddenly encountered and dissipated by some spearlike beam of light from the heart or soul; the traditions of a great literary form were not here a cause of embarrassment; they need not, as in work for the theatre, be laboriously observed or injuriously violated; the poet might assert his independence and be wholly original.

And original, in the best sense of the word—

entirely true to his highest self—Browning was in the "Dramatic Lyrics" of 1842, and the "Dramatic Romances and Lyrics" of 1845. His senses were at once singularly keen and energetic, and singularly capacious of delight; his eyes were active instruments of observation, and at the same time were possessed by a kind of rapture in form—and not least in fantastic form—and a rapture still finer in the opulence and variety of colour. In these poems we are caught into what may truly be called an enthusiasm of the senses; and presently we find that the senses, good for their own sakes, are good also as inlets to the spirit. Having returned from his first visit to southern Italy, the sights and sounds, striking upon the retina and the auditory nerve, with the intensity of a new experience, still attack the eye and ear as he writes his *Englishman in Italy*, and by virtue of their eager obsession demand and summon forth the appropriate word.[1] The fisherman from Amalfi pitches down his basket before us,

> All trembling alive
> With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit,
> —You touch the strange lumps,
> And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner
> Of horns and of humps.

Or it is the "quick rustle-down of the quail-nets," or the "whistling pelt" of the olives, when Scirocco is loose, that invades our ears. And by and by among the mountains the play of the senses expands, and the soul has its great word to utter:

[1] Browning's eyes were in a remarkable degree unequal in their power of vision; one was unusually long-sighted; the other, with which he could read the most microscopic print, unusually short-sighted.

God's own profound
Was above me, and round me the mountains,
And under, the sea,
And within me, my heart to bear witness
What was and shall be.

Not less vivid is the vision of the light craft with its lateen sail outside Triest, in which Waring—the Flying Englishman—is seen "with great grass hat and kerchief black," looking up for a moment, showing his "kingly throat," till suddenly in the sunset splendour the boat veers weather-ward and goes off, as with a bound, "into the rose and golden half of the sky." And what animal-painter has given more of the leonine wrath in mane and tail and fixed wide eyes than Browning has conveyed into his lion of King Francis with three strokes of the brush? Or it is only a bee upon a sunflower on which the gazer's eye is fixed, and we get the word of Rudel:

And therefore bask the bees
On my flower's breast, as on a platform broad.

Or—a grief to booklovers!—the same eye is occupied by all the grotesquerie of insect life in the revel over that unhappy tome lurking in the plum tree's crevice of Browning's *Garden Fancy*, which creeps and crawls with beetle and spider, worm and eft.[1] Or it is night and moonlight by the sandy shore, and for a moment—before love enters—all the mind of the impressionist artist lives merely in the eye:

[1] See a very interesting passage on Browning's "odd liking for 'vermin'" in *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.* i. 370, 371: "I always liked all those wild creatures God '*sets up for themselves.*'" "It seemed awful to watch that bee—he seemed so *instantly* from the teaching of God."

The grey sea and the long black land ;
And the yellow half-moon large and low ;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep
As I gain the cove with pushing prow.

If Browning did not rejoice in perfect health and animal spirits—and in the letters to Miss Barrett we hear of frequent headaches and find a reference to his pale thin face as seen in a mirror—he had certainly the imagination of perfect vitality and of those "wild joys of living," sung by the young harper David in that poem of *Saul*, which appeared as a fragment in the *Bells and Pomegranates*, and as a whole ten years later, with the awe and rapture of the spirit rising above the rapture of the senses.[1]

Of these poems of 1842 and 1845 one, *The Pied Piper*, was written in the spirit of mere play and was included in *Bells and Pomegranates* only to make up a number, for which the printer required more copy. One or two—the flesh and blood incarnations of the wines of France and Hungary, *Claret* and *Tokay*, are no more than clever caprices of the fancy. One, *The Lost Leader*, remotely suggested by the conservatism of Wordsworth's elder days, but possibly deflected by some of the feeling attributed to Pym in relation to Strafford of the drama, and certainly detached from direct personal reference to Wordsworth, expresses Browning's liberal sentiment in politics. One, the stately *Artemis Prologuizes*, is the sole remaining fragment of a classical drama "Hippolytus and Aricia," composed in 1840, much against my endeavour,"

[1] Of the first part of *Saul* Mr Kenyon said finely that "it reminded him of Homer's shield of Achilles thrown into lyrical whirl and life" (*Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.* i. 326).

wrote the poet,—a somewhat enigmatical phrase—"while in bed with a fever." A considerable number of the poems may be grouped together as expressions or demonstrations of various passions, central among which is the passion of love. A few, and these conspicuous for their masterly handling of novel themes, treat of art, and the feeling for art as seen in the painter of pictures or in the connoisseur. Nor is the interpretation of religious emotion—though in a phase that may be called abnormal—wholly forgotten.

With every passion that expands the spirit beyond the bounds of self, Browning, as the dramas have made evident to us, is in cordial sympathy. The reckless loyalty, with its animal spirits and its dash of grief, the bitterer because grief must be dismissed, of the *Cavalier Tunes*, is true to England and to the time in its heartiness and gallant bluffness. The leap-up of pride and joy in a boy's heart at the moment of death in his Emperor's cause could hardly be more intensely imagined than it is in the poem of the French camp, and all is made more real and vivid by the presence of that motionless figure, intent on victory and sustaining the weight of imperial anxieties, which yet cannot be quite impassive in presence of a death so devoted. And side by side with this poem of generous enthusiasm is placed the poem of passion reduced to its extreme of meanness, its most contracted form of petty spite and base envy—the *Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister*; a grotesque insect, spitting ineffectual poison, is placed under the magnifying-glass of the comic spirit, and is discovered to be—a brother in religion! A noble hatred, transcending personal considerations, mingles with a noble and solemn love—the passion of country

—in the Italian exile's record of his escape from Austrian pursuers; with the clear-obscure of his patriotic melancholy mingles the proud recollection of the Italian woman who was his saviour, over whose conjectured happiness as peasant wife and peasant mother the exile bows with a tender joy. The examples of abnormal passion are two—that of the amorous homicide who would set on one perfect moment the seal of eternity, in *Porphyria's Lover*, and that of the other occupier of the mad-house cells, Johannes Agricola, whose passion of religion is pushed to the extreme of a mystical antinomianism.

Browning's poems of the love of man and woman are seldom a simple lyrical cry, but they are not on this account the less true in their presentment of that curious masquer and disguiser—Love. When love takes possession of a nature which is complex, affluents and tributaries from many and various faculties run into the main stream. With Browning the passion is indeed a regal power, but intellect, imagination, fancy are its office-bearers for a time; then in a moment it resumes all authority into its own hands, resolves of a sudden all that is complex into the singleness of joy or pain, fuses all that is manifold into the unity of its own life and being. His dramatic method requires that each single faculty should be seen in the environment of a character, and that its operations should be clothed more or less in circumstance. And since love has its ingenuities, its fine-spun and far-flung threads of association, its occult symbolisms, Browning knows how to press into the service of the central emotion objects and incidents and imagery which may seem remote or curious or fantastic or trivial or even

grotesque. In *Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli* love which cometh by the hearing of the ear (for Rudel is a sun-worshipper who has never seen his sun) is a pure imaginative devotion to the ideal. In *Count Gismond* love is the deliverer; the motive of the poem is essentially that of the Perseus and Andromeda myth refined upon and mediævalised. In *Cristine* love is the interpreter of life; a moment of high passion explains, and explains away, all else that would obscure the vision of what is best and most real in this our world and in the worlds that are yet unattained. From a few lines written to illustrate a Venetian picture by Maclise *In a Gondola* was evolved. If Browning was not entirely accurate in his topography of Venice, he certainly did not fail in his sense of the depth and opulence of its colour. Here the abandonment to passion is relieved by the quaint ingenuities and fancies of love that seeks a momentary refuge from its own excess, and then returns more eagerly upon itself; and the shadow of death is ever at hand, but like the shadows of a Venetian painter it glows with colour.

The motives of two narrative poems, *The Glove* and *The Flight of the Duchess,* have much in common; they lie in the contrast between the world of convention and the world of reality. In each the insulter of proprieties, the breaker of bounds is a woman; in each the choice lies between a life of pretended love and vain dignities and a life of freedom and true love; and in each case the woman makes her glad escape from what is false to what is true. In restating the incident of the glove Browning brings into play his casuistry, but casuistry is here used to justify a passion

which the poet approves, to elucidate, not to obscur what he represents as the truth of the situation. *T Flight of the Duchess* in part took its rise "from a lin 'Following the Queen of the Gipsies, O!'—the burde of a song, which the poet, when a boy, heard a woma singing on a Guy Fawkes' day." Some two hundre lines were given to Hood for his magazine, at a tim when Hood needed help, and death was approachin him. The poem was completed some months late It is written, like *The Glove*, in verse that runs fo swiftness' sake, and that is pleased to show its pace on a road rough with boulder-like rhymes. The littl Duchess is a wild bird caged in the strangely twiste wirework of artificial modes and forms. She is prisoner who is starved for real life, and stifles; th fresh air and the open sky are good, are irresistible— and that is the whole long poem in brief. Such small prisoner, all life and fire, was before man months actually delivered from her cage in Wimpol Street, and Robert Browning himself, growing i stature amid his incantations, played the part of th gipsy.

Another Duchess, who pined for freedom and neve attained it, has her cold obituary notice from he bereaved Duke's lips in the *Dramatic Lyrics* of 184 *My Last Duchess* was there made a companion poer to *Count Gismond*; they are the pictures of the bond woman and of the freed-woman in marriage. Th Italian Duchess revolts from the law of wifehood n further than a misplaced smile or a faint half-flus betraying her inward breathings and beamings of th spirit; the noose of the ducal proprieties is aroun her throat, and when it tightens "then all smile

opped together." Never was an agony hinted with ore gentlemanly reserve. But the poem is remarkble chiefly as gathering up into a typical repreentative a whole phase of civilisation. The Duke is alian of Renaissance days; insensible in his egoistic ride to the beautiful humanity alive before him; yet connoisseur of art to his finger-tips; and after all a Duchess can be replaced, while the bronze of Claus of nnsbruck—but the glory of his possessions must not e pressed, as though his nine hundred years old name ere not enough. The true gift of art—Browning in ater poems frequently insists upon this—is not for ne connoisseur or collector who rests in a material ossession, but for the artist who, in the zeal of reation, presses through his own work to that unttainable beauty, that flying joy which exists beyond is grasp and for ever lures him forward. In *Pictor Ignotus* the earliest study in his lives of the painters vas made by the poet. The world is gross, its touch nsanctifies the sanctities of art; yet the brave audaity of genius is able to penetrate this gross world vith spiritual fire. Browning's unknown painter is a lelicate spirit, who dares not mingle his soul with the gross world; he has failed for lack of a robust faith, strenuous courage. But his failure is beautiful and pathetic, and for a time at least his Virgin, Babe, and Saint will smile from the cloister wall with their "cold, calm, beautiful regard." And yet to have done otherwise! to have been other than this; to have striven like that youth — the Urbinate — men praise so! More remarkable, as the summary of a civilisation, than *My Last Duchess*, is the address of the worldling Bishop, who lies dying, to the "nephews" who are

sons of his loins. In its Paganism of Christianity—which lacks all the manly virtue of genuine Paganism—that portion of the artistic Renaissance which lean towards the world and the flesh is concentrated and is given as in quintessential form. The feeble fingers yet cling to the vanities of earth ; the speaker babbles not of green fields but of his blue lump of lapis-lazuli and the last word of all is alive only with senile luxury and the malice of perishing recollection.

Chapter V

Love and Marriage

In 1841, John Kenyon, formerly a school-fellow of Browning's father, now an elderly lover of literature and of literary society, childless, wealthy, generous-hearted, proposed to Browning that he should call upon Elizabeth Barrett, Kenyon's cousin once removed, who was already distinguished as a writer of ardent and original verse. Browning consented, but the poetess "through some blind dislike of seeing strangers"—as she afterwards told a correspondent—declined, alleging, not untruly, as a ground of refusal, that she was then ailing in health.[1] Three years later Kenyon sent his cousin's new volumes of *Poems* as a gift to Sarianna Browning; her brother, lately returned from Italy, read these volumes with delight and admiration, and found on one of the pages a reference in verse to his "Pomegranates" of a kind that could not but give him a vivid moment of pleasure. Might he not relieve his sense of obligation by telling Miss Barrett, in a letter, that he admired her work? Mr Kenyon encouraged the suggestion, and though to love and be silent might on the whole have been more to Browning's liking, he wrote—January 10, 1845—and writing truthfully he

[1] *Letters of E. B. B.*, i. 288.

wrote enthusiastically.[1] Miss Barrett, never quite recovered from a riding accident in early girlhood, and stricken down for long in both soul and body by the shock of her brother's death by drowning, lay from day to day and month to month, in an upper room of her father's house in Wimpole Street, occupied, upon her sofa, with her books and papers—her Greek dramatists and her Elizabethan poets—shut out from the world, with windows for ever closed, and with only an occasional female visitor, to gossip of the social and literary life of London. Never was a spirit of more vivid fire enclosed within a tomb. The letter from Browning, "the author of *Paracelsus* and King of the mystics," threw her, she says, "into ecstasies." Her reply has a thrill of pleasure running through its graceful half-restraint, and she holds out a hope that when spring shall arrive a meeting in the invalid chamber between her and her new correspondent may be possible.

From the first a headlong yet delicate speed was in her pen; from the first there was much to say. "Oh, for a horse with wings!" Mr Browning, who had praised her poems, must tell her their faults. He must himself speak out in noble verse, not merely utter himself through the masks of *dramatis personæ*. Can she, as he alleges, really help him by her sympathy, by her counsel? Let him put ceremony aside and treat her *en bon camerade*; he will find her "an honest man on the whole." She intends to set about knowing him as much as possible immediately. What poets have been his literary sponsors? Are not the critics wrong to deny contemporary genius? What

[1] See *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, i. 281.

poems are those now in his portfolio? Is not Æschylus the divinest of divine Greek spirits? but how inadequately her correspondent has spoken of Dante! Shall they indeed—as he suggests—write something together? And then—is he duly careful of his health, careful against overwork? And is not gladness a duty? to give back to the world the joy that God has given to his poet? Though, indeed, to lean out of the window of this House of Life is for some the required, perhaps the happiest attitude.

And why—replies the second voice—lean out of the window? His own foot is only on the stair. Where are the faults of her poems, of which she had inquired? Yes, he will speak out, and he is now planning such a poem as she demands. But she it is, who has indeed spoken out in her verse? In his portfolio is a drama about a Moor of Othello's country, one Luria, with strange entanglings among his Florentines. See this, and this, how grandly it is said in the Greek of Æschylus! But Dante, all Dante is in his heart and head. And he has seen Tennyson face to face; and he knows and loves Carlyle; and he has visited Sorrento and trod upon Monte Calvano. Oh, the world in this year 1845 must be studied, though solitude is best. He has been "polking" all night, and walked home while the morning thrushes piped; and it is true that his head aches. She shall read and amend his manuscript poems. To hear from her is better than to see anybody else. But when shall he see her too?

So proceed from January to May the letters of Rudel and the still invisible Lady of Wimpole Street. It was happy comradeship on her part, but on his

it was already love. His spirit had recognised, had touched, a spirit, which included all that he most needed, and union with which would be the most certain and substantial prize offered by life. There was nothing fatuous in this inward assurance; it was the simplest and most self-evidencing truth. The word "mistrustful"—"do not see me as long as you are mistrustful of"—with its implied appeal to her generous confidence, precipitated the visit. How could she be mistrustful? Of course he may come: but the wish to do so was unwisely exorbitant. On the afternoon of May 20th, 1845, Browning first set eyes on his future wife, a little figure, which did not rise from the sofa, pale ringleted face, great eager, wistfully pathetic eyes. He believed that she was suffering from some incurable disease of the spine, and that whatever remained to her of life must be spent in this prostrate manner of an invalid.

A movement of what can only be imperfectly described as pity entered into his feeling for her: it was less pity than the joy of believing that he could confer as well as receive. But his first thought on leaving was only the fear that he might have stayed too long or might have spoken too loud. The visit was on Tuesday. On Thursday, Browning wrote the only letter of the correspondence which has been destroyed, one which overflowed with gratitude, and was immediately and rightly interpreted by the receiver as tending towards an offer, implied here, but not expressed, of marriage. It was read in pain and agitation; her heart indeed, but not her will, was shaken; and, after a sleepless night, she wrote words effective to bar—as she believed—all further advance

a direction fatal to his happiness. The intemperate ings he had said must be wholly forgotten between em; or else she will not see him again; friends, mrades in the life of the intellect they might continue be. For once and once only Browning lied to iss Barrett, and he lied a little awkwardly; his tter was only one of too boisterous gratitude; his nishment—that of one infinitely her inferior—was deserved; let her return to him the offending letter. eturned accordingly it was, and immediately destroyed the writer. In happier days, Miss Barrett hoped to cover what then would have been added to a hoard ich she treasured; but, Browning could not preserve e words which she had condemned.

Wise guardian-angels smile at each other, gently d graciously, when a lover is commanded to withaw and to reappear in the character of a friend. n incoming tide may seem for a while to pause; t by and by we look and the rock is covered. rowning very dutifully submitted and became a erary counsellor and comrade. The first stadium the progress of his fortunes opened in January d closed before the end of May; the second closed the end of August. To a friend Miss Barrett, sured that he never could be more, might well generous; visits were permitted, and it was left Browning to fix the days; the postal shuttle threw ift and swifter threads between New Cross, Hatcham, d 50 Wimpole Street. The verse of Tennyson, e novels of George Sand were discussed; her transtions from the Greek were considered; his manuscript ems were left for her corrections; but transcription ust not weary him into headaches; she would

herself by and by act as an amanuensis. Each
the correspondents could not rest happy until th
other had been proved to be in every intellectual an
moral quality the superior. Browning's praise cou
not be withheld; it seemed to his friend—and sh
wrote always with crystalline sincerity—to be a
illusion which humbled her. Glad memories of Ital
sad memories of England and the invalid life we
exchanged; there is nothing that she can teach him—
she declares—except grief. And yet to him the da
of his visit is his light through the dark week. He
like an Eastern Jew who creeps through alleys in th
meanest garb, destitute to all wayfarers' eyes, who y
possesses a hidden palace-hall of marble and gol
Even in matters ecclesiastical, the footsteps of the tw
friends had moved with one consent; each of the
preferred a chapel to a church; each was Puritan
a love of simplicity in the things of religion; eac
disowned the Puritan narrowness, and the grey aridit
of certain schools of dissent. On June 14—with th
warranty of her published poem which had told
flowers sent in a letter—Browning encloses in h
envelope a yellow rose; and again and again summ
flowers arrive bringing colour and sweetness into the di
city room. Once Miss Barrett can report that sh
has been out of doors, and with no fainting-fit, y
unable to venture in the carriage as far as the Park
still her bodily strength is no better than that of
tired bird; she is, moreover, years older than her frien
(the difference was in fact that between thirty-nin
and thirty-three); and the thunder of a July storm
has shaken her nerves. There is some thought of h
seeking health as far off as Malta or even Alexandria

t her father will jestingly have it that there is thing wrong with her except "obstinacy and dry ast." Thus cordially, gladly, sadly, and always th quick leapings of the indomitable flame of the rit, these letters of friend to friend run on ring the midsummer days. Browning was will- g and happy to wait; a confidence possessed m that in the end he would be known fully and ght.

On August 25th came a great outpouring of feeling om Miss Barrett. She took her friend so far into r confidence as to speak plainly of the household ficulties caused by her father's autocratic temper. ne conversation was immediately followed by a letter which she endeavoured to soften or qualify the pression her words had given, and her heart, now tir and craving sympathy, led her on to write of her ost sorrowful and sacred memories—those connected th her brother's death. Browning was deeply moved, ost grateful for her trust in him, but she had for- dden him to notice the record of her grief. He nged to return confidence with confidence, to tell nat was urgent in his heart. But the bar of three onths since had not been removed, and he hesitated speak. His two days' silence was unintelligible to s friend and caused her inexpressible anxiety. Could ny words of hers have displeased him? Or was he riously unwell? She wrote on August 30th a little tter asking "the alms of just one line" to relieve her ars. When snow-wreaths are loosened, a breath will ring down the avalanche. It was impossible to re- ive this appeal and not to declare briefly, decisively, s unqualified trust in her, his entire devotion, his

assured knowledge of what would constitute h
supreme happiness.

Miss Barrett's reply is perfect in its disinterest
safe-guarding of his freedom and his future good
she conceived it. She is deeply grateful, but s
cannot allow him to empty his water-gourds in
the sand. What could she give that it would n
be ungenerous to give? Yet his part has not be
altogether the harder of the two. The subject mu
be left. Such subjects, however, could not be left un
the facts were ascertained. Browning would not ur
her a step beyond her actual feelings, but he mu
know whether her refusal was based solely on her vie
of his supposed interests. And with the true delica
of frankness she admits that even the sense of her ov
unworthiness is not the insuperable obstacle. No—
but is she not a confirmed invalid? She thought th
she had done living when he came and sought her ou
If he would be wise, all these thoughts of her must
abandoned. Such an answer brought a great calm
Browning's heart; he did not desire to press h
further; let things rest; it is for her to judge;
what she regards as an obstacle should be remove
she will certainly then act in his best interests;
himself this matter of health creates no difficulty;
sit by her for an hour a day, to write out what w
in him for the world, and so to save his soul, wou
be to attain his ideal in life. What woman would n
be moved to the inmost depths by such words? Sh
insists that his noble extravagances must in no wi
bind him; but all the bitternesses of life have bee
taken away from her; henceforth she is his for ever
thing except to do him harm; the future rests wi

d and with him. And amid the letters containing se grave sentences, so full of fate, first appears a erence to the pet name of her childhood—the "Ba" ich is all that here serves, like Swift's "little guage," to indulge a foolish tenderness; and the nslator of *Prometheus* is able to put Greek characters their most delightful use in her "ὦ φίλταται."

In love-poetry of the Middle Age the allegorical rsonage named "Danger" plays a considerable part, d it is to be feared that Danger too often signified husband. In Wimpole Street that alarming person- e always meant a father. Edward Moulton Barrett s a man of integrity in business, of fortitude in versity, of a certain stern piety, and from the perior position of a domestic autocrat he could even dulge himself in occasional fiats of affection. We ed not question that there were springs of water in e rock, and in earlier days they had flowed freely. t now if at night he visited his ailing daughter's om for a few minutes and prayed with her and for r, it meant that on such an occasion she was not criminal to merit the pious intercession. If he led her "puss," it meant that she had not recently en an undutiful child of thirty-nine or forty years d. A circus-trainer probably rewards his educated gs and horses with like amiable familiarities, and is probably regarded by his troupe with affection ngled with awe. Mr Barrett had been appointed cus-trainer by the divine authority of parentage. one visited 50 Wimpole Street, where there were own-up sons as well as daughters, without special rmission from the lord of the castle; he authorised e visits of Mr Browning, the poet, being fondly

assured that Mr Browning's intentions were not tho
of a burglar, or—worse—an amorous knight-errar
If any daughter of his conceived the possibility
transferring her prime love and loyalty from himse
to another, she was even as Aholah and Aholibah wh
doted upon the Assyrians, captains, and rulers clothe
most gorgeously, all of them desirable young me
"If a prince of Eldorado" said Elizabeth Barrett
her sister Arabel, "should come with a pedigree
lineal descent from some signory in the moon in or
hand, and a ticket of good behaviour from the neare
Independent chapel in the other—" "Why, even then
interrupted Arabel, "it would not *do*." One admirab
trait, however, Mr Moulton Barrett did possess—h
was nearly always away from home till six o'clock.

The design that Miss Barrett should winter abroa
was still under consideration, but the place now fixe
upon was Pisa. Suddenly, in mid-September, she fin
herself obliged to announce that "it is all over wi
Pisa." Her father had vetoed the undutiful proje
and had ceased to pay her his evening visits; on
in his separate and private orisons were all her si
remembered. To admit the fact that he did not lo
her enough to give her a chance of recovery w
bitter, yet it could not be denied. Her life was no
a thing of value to herself, for it was precious
another. She beat against the bars of her cag
planned a rebellious flight; made inquiries respecti
ships and berths; but she could not travel alone; a
she would not subject either of her sisters to t
heavy displeasure of the ruler of the house. Rob
Browning held strong opinions on the duty of
sisting evil, and if evil assume the guise of paren

hority it is none the less—he believed—to be isted. To submit to the will of another is often y; to act on one's own best judgment is hard; faculties were given us to put to use; to be ssively obedient is really to evade probation—so h almost excessive emphasis Browning set forth a dinal article of his creed; but Elizabeth Barrett s not, like him, "ever a fighter," and, after all, ndon in 1845 was not bleak and grey as it had en a year previously—"for reasons," to adopt a terated word of the correspondence, "for reasons." On two later occasions Browning sang the same tle-hymn against the enemies of God and with a le too much vehemence—not to say truculence—is the way with earnest believers. His gentler respondent could not tolerate the thought of elling, and she disapproved of punishment by death. owning argues that for one who values the good inion of society—not for himself—that good inion is a possession which may, like other posses-ns, be defended at the risk of a man's life, and as capital punishment, is not evil to be suppressed at y price? Is not a miscreant to be expelled out of d's world? The difference of opinion was the first at had arisen between the friends, and Browning's rds carried with them a certain sense of pain in the ought that they could in any thing stand apart. appily the theoretical fire-eater had faith superior his own arguments;—faith in a woman's insight finer than his own;—and he is let off with a gratified uke for preternatural submissiveness and for array-g her in pontifical garments of authority which hang se upon so small a figure. The other application of

his doctrine of resisting evil was even more trying
her feelings and the preacher was instant certainly o
of season. Not the least important personage in t
Wimpole Street house was Miss Barrett's devot
companion Flush. Loyal and loving to his mistre
Flushie always was ; yet to his lot some canine erro
fell ; he eyed a visitor's umbrella with suspicion ;
resented perhaps the presence of a rival ; he did n
behave nicely to a poet who had not written vers
in his honour ; for which he was duly rebuked by h
mistress—the punishment was not capital—and w
propitiated with bags of cakes by the intrud
When the day for their flight drew near, Miss Barre
proposed somewhat timidly that her maid Wilso
should accompany her to Italy, but she was grateful
confident that Flush could not be left behind. Ju
at this anxious moment a dreadful thing befell ;
gang of dog-stealers, presided over by the arch-fie
Taylor, bore Flushie away into the horror of so
obscure and vulgar London alley. He was a diffic
dog to capture and his ransom must be in proporti
to his resistance. There was a terrible tradition of
lady who had haggled about the sum demanded a
had received her dog's head in a parcel. Miss Barr
was eager to part with her six guineas and rescue h
faithful companion from misery. Was this an occasi
for preaching from ethical heights the sin of maki
a composition with evil-doers? Yet Browning, s
"a fighter" and armed with desperate logic, m
needs declaim vehemently against the iniquity of su
a bargain. It is something to rejoice at that he w
dexterously worsted in argument, being compelled
admit that if Italian banditti were to carry off

Ba," he would pay down every farthing he might ave in the world to recover her, and this before he ntered on that chase of fifty years which was not to erminate until he had shot down with his own hand ne receiver of the infamous bribe.

The journey of Miss Barrett to Pisa having been r the present abandoned, friendship, now acknow-dged to be more than friendship, resumed its ccustomed ways. Visits, it was agreed, were not be too frequent—three in each fortnight might rudently be ventured; but Wednesday might have be exchanged for Thursday, or Saturday for Monday, on the first elected day Miss Mitford—dear and enerous friend—threatened to come with her talk, lk, talk, or Mrs Jameson with her drawings and art-iticism, or some unknown lion-huntress who had rown her toils, or kindly Mr Kenyon, who knew of rowning's visits, and who when he called would peer rough his all-scrutinising spectacles with an air of xcessive penetration or too extreme unconsciousness. nd there were times—later on—when an avalanche aunts and uncles would precipitate itself on Wimpole treet—perspicacious aunts and amiable uncles who ere wished as far off as Seringapatam, and who rung from an impatient niece—to whom indeed ey were dear—the cry "The barbarians are upon s." Miss Barrett's sisters, the gentle Henrietta, who referred a waltz to the best sermon of an Independent inister, and the more serious Arabel, who preferred e sermon of an Independent minister to the best altz, were informed of the actual state of affairs. hey were trustworthy and sympathetic; Henrietta ad special reasons of her own for sympathy; Captain

Surtees Cook, who afterwards became her husband might be discussing affairs with her in the drawing-room at the same time that Mr Browning the poet—"the man of the pomegranates" as he was named by Mr Barrett—held converse on literature with Elizabeth in the upper chamber. The household was honeycombed with treasons.

For the humours of superficial situations and passing incidents Miss Barrett had a lively sense, and she found some relief in playing with them; but with a nature essentially truthful like hers the necessity of concealment was a cause of distress. The position was no less painful to Browning, and in the end it became intolerable. Yet while there were obstructions and winding ways in the shallows, in the depths were flawless truth and inviolable love. What sentimental persons fancy and grow effusive over was here the simplest and yet always a miraculous reality—"He of the heavens and earth brought us together so wonderfully, holding two souls in his hand."[1] In the most illuminating words of each correspondent no merely private, or peculiar feeling is expressed; it is the common wave of human passion, the common love of man and woman, that here leaps from the depths to the height, and over which the iris of beauty ever and anon appears with—it is true—an unusual intensity. And so in reading the letters we have no sense of prying into secrets; there are no secrets to be discovered; what is most intimate is most common; only here what is most common rises up to its highest point of attainment. "I never thought of being happy through you or by you or in you even, your good was

[1] E. B. B. to R. B., March 30, 1846.

l my idea of good, and *is*" "Let me be too near to
e seen. . . . Once I used to be more uneasy, and to
ink that I ought to *make* you see me. But Love
better than sight." "I love your love too much.
nd *that* is the worst fault, my beloved, I can ever
nd in my love of *you*." These are sentences that
ll of what can be no private possession, being as
oeral and free as our light and air. And if the
nadow of a cloud appears—appears and passes away
—it is a shadow that has floated over many other
earts beside that of the writer: "How dreadfully
atural it would be to me, seem to me, if you *did*
ave off loving me! How it would be like the sun's
etting . . . and no more wonder. Only, more dark-
ess." The old exchange of tokens, the old symbolisms
—a lock of hair, a ring, a picture, a child's penholder
—are good enough for these lovers, as they had been
r others before them. What is diffused through
any of the letters is gathered up and is delivered
om the alloy of superficial circumstance in the
Sonnets from the Portuguese," in reading which we
e in the presence of womanhood—womanhood
elivered from death by love and from darkness by
ght—as much as in that of an individual woman.
nd the disclosure in poems and in letters being
ithout reserve affects us as no disclosure, but simply
s an adequate expression of the truth universal.

One obstacle to the prospective marriage was steadily
minishing in magnitude; Miss Barrett, with a new
y in life, new hopes, new interests, gained in health
nd strength from month to month. The winter of
845-46 was unusually mild. In January one day
ae walked—walked, and was not carried—downstairs

to the drawing-room. Spring came early that year in the first week of February lilacs and hawthorn were in bud, elders in leaf, thrushes and white-throats in full song. In April Miss Barrett gave pledges of her confidence in the future by buying a bonnet; a little like a Quaker's, it seemed to her, but the learned pronounced it fashionable. Early in May, that bonnet with its owner and Arabel and Flush, appeared in Regent's Park, while sunshine was filtering through the leaves. The invalid left her carriage, set foot upon the green grass, reached up and plucked a little laburnum blossom ("for reasons"), saw the "strange people moving about like phantoms of life," and felt that she alone and the idea of one who was absent were real—"and Flush," she adds with a touch of remorse, "and Flush a little too." Many drives and walks followed; at the end of May she feloniously gathered some pansies, the flowers of Paracelsus, and this notwithstanding the protest of Arabel, in the Botanical Gardens, and felt the unspeakable beauty of the common grass. Later in the year wild roses were found at Hampstead; and on a memorable day the invalid—almost perfect in health—was guided by kind and learned Mrs Jameson through the pictures and statues of the poet Rogers's collection. On yet another occasion it was Mr Kenyon who drove her to see the strange new sight of the Great Western train coming in; the spectators procured chairs, but the rush of people and the earth-thunder of the engine almost overcame Miss Barrett's nerves, which on a later trial shrank also from the more harmonious thunder of the organ of the Abbey. Sundays came when she enjoyed the privilege of sitting if not in

ew at least in the secluded vestry of a Chapel, and ining unseen in those simple forms of prayer and raise which she valued most. Altogether something ke a miracle in the healing of the sick had been ffected.

Money difficulty there was none. Browning, it is ue, was not in a position to undertake the expenses even such a simple household economy as they oth desired. He was prepared to seek for any onourable service—diplomatic or other—if that were ecessary. But Miss Barrett was resolved against sk-work which might divert him from his proper ocation as a poet. And, thanks to the affection of n uncle, she had means—some £400 a year, capable considerable increase by re-investment of the rincipal—which were enough for two persons who ould be content with plain living in Italy. Browning ill urged that he should be the bread-winner; he nplored that her money should be made over to her vn family, so that no prejudice against his action ould be founded on any mercenary feeling; but she mained firm, and would consent only to its transrence to her two sisters in the event of his death. nd so the matter rested and was dismissed from the oughts of both the friends.

Having the great patience of love, Browning would ot put the least pressure upon Miss Barrett as to the ate of their marriage; if waiting long was for her ood, then he would wait. But matters seemed tendg towards the desired end. In January he begged er to "begin thinking"; before that month had osed it was agreed that they should look forward the late summer or early autumn as the time of

their departure to Italy. Not until March would Mis Barrett permit Browning to fetter his free will by an engagement; then, to satisfy his urgent desire, sh declared that she was willing to chain him, rivet him— "Do you feel how the little fine chain twists round an round you? do you hear the stroke of the riveting? But the links were of a kind to be loosed if need be a a moment's notice. June came, and with it a proposa from a well-intentioned friend, Miss Bayley, to accom pany her to Italy, if, by and by, such a change of abod seemed likely to benefit her health. Miss Barrett wa prepared to accept the offer if it seemed right t Browning, or was ready, if he thought it expedient, t wait for another year. His voice was given, with suc decision as was possible, in favour of their adhering t the plan formed for the end of summer; they bot felt the present position hazardous and tormenting to wear the mask for another year would suffocat them; they were "standing on hot scythes."

Accordingly during the summer weeks there much poring over guide-books to Italy; much weigh ing of the merits of this place of residence and of tha Shall it be Sorrento? Shall it be La Cava? or Pisa or Ravenna? or, for the matter of that, would n Seven Dials be as happy a choice as any, if only the could live and work side by side? There is muc balancing of the comparative ease and the comparati cost of routes, the final decision being in favour reaching Italy by way of France. And as the tim draws nearer there is much searching of time-tables, the art of mastering which Robert Browning seem hardly to have been an expert. May Mr Kenyon told? Or is it not kinder and wiser to spare him t

sponsibility of knowing? Mrs Jameson, who had ade a friendly proposal similar to that of Miss ayley,—may she be half-told? Or shall she be vited to join the travellers on their way? What ooks shall be brought? What baggage? And how ay a box and a carpet bag be conveyed out of 50 Vimpole Street with least observation?

It was deeply repugnant to Miss Barrett's feelings practise reserve on such a matter as this with her ther. Her happier companion had informed his ther and mother of their plans, and had obtained om the elder Mr Browning a sum of money, asked r as a loan rather than a gift, sufficient to cover the nmediate expenses of the journey. Mr Barrett was ntitled to all respect, and as for affection he received om his daughter enough to make the appearance of sloyalty to him carry a real pang to her heart. But ie believed that she had virtually no choice; her erves were not of iron; the roaring of the Great Vestern express she might face but not an angry ther. A loud voice, and a violent "scene," such ; she had witnessed, until she fainted, when Henrietta as the culprit, would have put an end to the Italian roject through mere physical collapse and ruin. Far etter therefore to withdraw quietly from the house, nd trust to the effect of a subsequent pleading in all rnestness for reconciliation.

As summer passed into early autumn the sense of ngers and difficulties accumulating grew acute. The ground," wrote Browning, "is crumbling from eneath our feet with its chances and opportunities." one of the early days of August a thunder-storm ith torrents of rain detained him for longer than

usual at Wimpole Street; the lightning was the lesser terror of the day, for in the evening entered Mr Barrett to his daughter with disagreeable questioning; and presently came the words—accompanied by a gaze of stern displeasure—"It appears that *that man* has spent the whole day with you." The louring cloud passed, but it was felt that visits to be prudent must be rare; for the first time a week went by without a meeting. Early in September George Barrett, a kindly brother distinguished by his constant air of dignity and importance, was commissioned to hire a country house for the family at Dover or Reigate or Tunbridge, while paperers and painters were to busy themselves at Wimpole Street. The moment for immediate action had come; else all chance of Italy might be lost for the year 1846. "We must be married directly," wrote Browning on the morning when this intelligence arrived. Next day a marriage license was procured. On the following morning, Saturday, September 12th, accompanied by her maid Wilson, Miss Barrett, after a sleepless night, left her father's house with feet that trembled; she procured a fly, fortified her shaken nerves with a dose of sal volatile at a chemist's shop, and drove to Marylebone Church, where the marriage service was celebrated in the presence of two witnesses. As she stood and knelt her central feeling was one of measureless trust, a deep rest upon assured foundations; other women who had stood there supported by their nearest kinsfolk—parents or sisters—had one happiness she did not know; she needed it less because she was happier than they.[1] Then husband and wife parted

[1] E. B. B. to R. B., Sept. 14, 1846.

Mrs Browning drove to the house of her blind friend, Mr Boyd, who had been made aware of the engagement. On his sitting-room sofa she rested and sipped his Cyprus wine; by and by arrived her sisters with grave faces; the carriage was driven to Hampstead Heath for the soothing happiness of the autumnal air and sunshine; after which the three sisters returned to their father's house; the wedding-ring was regretfully taken off; and the prayer arose in Mrs Browning's heart that if sorrow or injury should ever follow upon what had happened that day for either of the two, it might all fall upon her.

Browning did not again visit at 50 Wimpole Street; it was enough to know that his wife was well, and kept all these things gladly, tremblingly, in her heart. For himself he felt that come what might his life had "borne flower and fruit."[1] On the Monday week which succeeded the marriage the Barrett family were to move to the country house that had been taken at Little Bookham. On Saturday afternoon, a week having gone by since the wedding, Mrs Browning and Wilson, left what had been her home. Flush was warned to make no demonstration, and he behaved with admirable discretion. It was "dreadful" to cause pain to her father by a voluntary act; but another feeling sustained her:—"You *only*! As if one said *God only*. And we shall have *Him* beside, I pray of Him." At Hodgson's, the stationer and bookseller's, they found Browning, and a little later husband and wife, with the brave Wilson and the discreet Flush, were speeding from Vauxhall to Southampton, in good time to catch the boat for Havre. A north wind blew

[1] R. B. to E. B. B., Sept. 14, 1846.

them vehemently from the English coast. In the newspaper announcements of the wedding the date was to be omitted, and Browning rejected the suggestion that on this occasion, and with reference to the great event of his life, he should be defined to the public as "the author of *Paracelsus*."

Chapter VI

Early Years in Italy

THE letters from which this story has been drawn have from first to last one burden; in them deep answers to deep; they happily are of a nature to escape far from the pedantries of literary criticism. It cannot be maintained that Browning quite equals his correspondent in the discovery of rare and exquisite thoughts and feelings; or that his felicity in giving them expression is as frequent as hers. Even on matters of literature his comments are less original than hers, less penetrating, less illuminating. Her wit is the swifter and keener. When Browning writes to afford her amusement, he sometimes appears to us, who are not greatly amused, a little awkward and laborious. She flashes forth a metaphor which embodies some mystery of feeling in an image entirely vital; he, with a habit of mind of which he was conscious and which often influences his poetry, fastens intensely on a single point and proceeds to muffle this in circumstance, assured that it will be all the more vividly apparent when the right instant arrives and requires this; but meanwhile some staying-power is demanded from the reader. Neither correspondent has the art of etching a person or a scene in a few decisive lines; the gift of Carlyle, the gift of Carlyle's brilliant wife is not theirs, perhaps because acid is

needed to bite an etcher's plate. And, indeed, many of the minor notabilities of 1845, whose names appear in these letters, might hardly have repaid an etcher's intensity of selective vision. Among the groups of spirits who presented themselves to Dante there were some wise enough not to expect that their names should be remembered on earth; such shades may stand in a background. It is, however, strange that Browning who created so many living men and women should in his letters have struck out no swift indelible piece of portraiture; even here his is the inferior touch. And yet throughout the whole correspondence we cannot but be aware that his is the more massive and the more complex nature; his intellect has hardier thews; his passion has an energy which corresponds with its mass; his will sustains his passion and projects it forward. And towards Miss Barrett his strength is seen as gentleness, his energy as an inexhaustible patience of hope.

When Browning and his wife reached Paris, Mrs Browning was worn out by the excitement and fatigue. By a happy accident Mrs Jameson and her niece were at hand, and when the first surprise, with kisses to both fugitives, was over, she persuaded them to rest for a week where they were, promising, if they consented, to be their companion and aider until they arrived at Pisa. Their "imprudence," in her eyes, was "the height of prudence"; "wild poets or not" they were "wise people." The week at Paris was given up to quietude; once they visited the Louvre, but the hours passed for the most part indoors; it all seemed strange and visionary—"Whether in the body or out of the body," wrote Mrs Browning, "I cannot tell scarcely."

From Paris and Orleans they proceeded southwards in weather, which, notwithstanding some rains, was delightful. From Avignon they went on pilgrimage to Petrarch's Vaucluse; Browning bore his wife to a rock in mid stream and seated her there, while Flush scurried after in alarm for his mistress. In the passage from Marseilles to Genoa, Mrs Browning was able to sit on deck; the change of air, although gained at the expense of some weariness, had done her a world of good.

Early in October the journeying closed at Pisa. Rooms were taken for six months in the great Collegio Ferdinando, close to the Duomo and the Leaning Tower, rooms not quite the warmest in aspect. Mrs Jameson pronounced the invalid not improved but transformed. The repose of the city, asleep, as Dickens described it, in the sun and the secluded life—a perpetual *tête-à-tête*, but one so happy—suited both the wedded friends; days of cloudless weather, following a spell of rain, went by in "reading and writing and talking of all things in heaven and earth, and a little besides; and sometimes even laughing as if we had twenty people to laugh with us, or rather *hadn't*." Their sole acquaintance was an Italian Professor of the University; for three months they never looked at a newspaper; then a loophole on the world was opened each evening by the arrival of the Siècle. The lizards were silent friends of one poet, and golden oranges gleamed over the walls to the unaccustomed eyes of the other like sunshine gathered into globes. They wandered through pine-woods and drove until the purple mountains seemed not far off. At the Lanfranchi Palace they thought of Byron, to

see a curl of whose hair or a glove from whose hand Browning declares (so foolish was he and ignorant) he would have gone farther than to see all Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey condensed in Rosicrucian fashion into a vial. In the Campo Santo they listened to a musical mass for the dead. In the Duomo they heard the Friar preach. And early in the morning their dreams were scattered by the harmonious clangour of the church bells. "I never was happy before in my life," wrote Mrs Browning. Her husband relieved her of all housekeeping anxieties. At two o'clock came a light dinner—perhaps thrushes and chianti—from the *trattoria*; at six appeared coffee and milk-rolls; at nine, when the pine-fire blazed, roast chestnuts and grapes. Debts there were none to vex the spirits of these prudent children of genius. If a poet could not pay his butcher's and his baker's bills, Browning's sympathies were all with the baker and the butcher. "He would not sleep," wrote his wife, "if an unpaid bill dragged itself by any chance into another week"; and elsewhere: "Being descended from the blood of all the Puritans, and educated by the strictest of dissenters, he has a sort of horror about the dreadful fact of owing five shillings five days." Perhaps some of this horror arose from the sense of that weight which pecuniary cares hang upon all the more joyous mountings of the mind. One grief and only one was still present; Mr Barrett remained inexorable; his daughter hoped that with time and patience his arms would open to her again. It was a hope never to be fulfilled. In the cordial comradeship of Browning's sister, Sarianna, a new correspondent, there was a measure of compensation.

Already Browning had in view the collected edition of his Poetical Works which did not appear until 1849. The poems were to be made so lucid, "that everyone who understood them hitherto" was to "lose that mark of distinction." *Paracelsus* and *Pippa* were to be revised with special care. The sales reported by Moxon were considered satisfactory; but of course the profits as yet were those of his wife's poems. "She is," he wrote to his publisher, "there as in all else, as high above me as I would have her."

It was at Pisa that the highest evidence of his wife's powers as a poet came as an unexpected and wonderful gift to her husband. In a letter of December 1845—more than a year since—she had confessed that she was idle; and yet "silent" was a better word she thought than "idle." Her apology was that the apostle Paul probably did not work hard at tent-making during the week that followed his hearing of the unspeakable things. At the close of a letter written on July 22, 1846, she wrote: "You shall see some day at Pisa what I will not show you now. Does not Solomon say that 'there is a time to read what is written?' If he doesn't, he ought." The time to read had now come. "One day, early in 1847," as Mr Gosse records what was told to him by Browning, "their breakfast being over, Mrs Browning went upstairs, while her husband stood at the window watching the street till the table should be cleared. He was presently aware of someone behind him, although the servant was gone. It was Mrs Browning who held him by the shoulder to prevent his turning to look at her, and at the same time pushed a packet of papers into the pocket of his coat. She told him

to read that, and to tear it up if he did not like it; and then she fled again to her own room." The papers were a transcript of those ardent poems which we know as "Sonnets from the Portuguese." Some copies were printed at Reading in 1847 for private circulation with the title "Sonnets by E. B. B." The later title under which they appeared among Mrs Browning's Poems in the edition of 1850 was of Browning's suggestion. His wife's proposal to name them "Sonnets from the Bosnian" was dismissed with words which allude to a poem of hers, "Catarina to Camoens," that had long been specially dear to him: "Bosnian, no! that means nothing. From the Portuguese: they are Catarina's sonnets!"

Pisa with all its charm lacked movement and animation. It was decided to visit Florence in April, and there enjoy for some days the society of Mrs Jameson before she left Italy. The coupé of the diligence was secured, and on April 20th Mrs Jameson's "wild poets but wise people" arrived at Florence. An excellent apartment was found in the Via delle Belle Donne near the Piazza Santa Maria Novella, and for Browning's special delight a grand piano was hired. When Mrs Browning had sufficiently recovered strength to view the city and its surroundings her pleasure was great: "At Pisa we say, 'How beautiful!' here we say nothing; it is enough if we can breathe." They had hoped for summer wanderings in Northern Italy; but Florence held them throughout the year except for a few days during which they attempted in vain to find a shelter from the heat among the pines of Vallombrosa. Provided with a letter of recommendation to the abbot they set forth from their rooms at

early morning by vettura and from Pelago onwards, while Browning rode, Mrs Browning and Wilson in basket sledges were slowly drawn towards the monastery by white bullocks. A new abbot, a little holy man with a red face, had been recently installed, who announced that in his nostrils "a petticoat stank." Yet in the charity of his heart he extended the three days ordinarily permitted to visitors in the House of Strangers to five; during which period beef and oil, malodorous bread and wine and passages from the "Life of San Gualberto" were vouchsafed to heretics of both sexes; the mountains and the pinewoods in their solemn dialect spoke comfortable words.

"Rolling or sliding down the precipitous path" they returned to Florence in a morning glory, very merry, says Mrs Browning, for disappointed people. Shelter from the glare of August being desirable, a suite of comparatively cool rooms in the Palazzo Guidi were taken; they were furnished in good taste, and opened upon a terrace—"a sort of balcony terrace which . . . swims over with moonlight in the evenings." From Casa Guidi windows—and before long Mrs Browning was occupied with the first part of her poem—something of the life of Italy at a moment of peculiar interest could be observed. Europe in the years 1847 and 1848 was like a sea broken by wave after wave of Revolutionary passion. Browning and his wife were ardently liberal in their political feeling; but there were differences in the colours of their respective creeds and sentiments. Mrs Browning gave away her imagination to popular movements; she was also naturally a hero-worshipper; she hoped more enthusiastically than he was wont to do; she was more readily

depressed; the word "liberty" for her had an aureo
or a nimbus which glorified all its humbler and mo
prosaic meanings. Browning, although in this ye
1847 he made a move towards an appointment
secretary to a mission to the Vatican, at heart care
little for men in groups or societies; he cared great
for individuals, for the growth of individual characte
He had faith in a forward movement of society; b
the law of social evolution, as he conceived it, is not
the hands of political leaders or ministers of stat
He valued liberty chiefly because each man here
earth is in process of being tested, in process of bei
formed, and liberty is the condition of a man's tri
probation and development. Late in life he w
asked to give his answer to the question: "Why am
a Liberal?" and he gave it succinctly in a sonn
which he did not reprint in any edition of his Work
although it received otherwise a wide circulation.
may be cited here as a fragment of biography:

"Why?" Because all I haply can and do,
All that I am now, all I hope to be,—
Whence comes it save from fortune setting free
Body and soul the purpose to pursue,
God traced for both? If fetters, not a few,
Of prejudice, convention, fall from me,
These shall I bid men—each in his degree
Also God-guided—bear, and gladly too?

But little do or can the best of us:
That little is achieved through Liberty.
Who then dares hold—emancipated thus—
His fellow shall continue bound? Not I
Who live, love, labour freely, nor discuss
A brother's right to freedom. That is "Why."[1]

[1] "Why am I a Liberal?" Edited by Andrew Reid. London, 18

This is an excellent reason for the faith that was in Browning; he holds that individual progress depends on individual freedom, and by that word he understands not only political freedom but also emancipation from intellectual narrowness and the bondage of injurious convention. But Browning in his verse, setting aside the early *Strafford*, nowhere celebrates a popular political movement; he nowhere chaunts a pæan, in the manner of Byron or Shelley, in honour of the abstraction "Liberty." Nor does he anywhere study political phenomena or events except as they throw light upon an individual character. Things and persons that gave him offence he could summarily dismiss from his mind—"Thiers is a rascal; I make point of not reading one word said by M. Thiers"; Proudhon is a madman; who cares for Proudhon?" The President's an ass; *he* is not worth thinking of."[1] This may be admirable economy of intellectual force; but it is not the way to understand the course of public events; it does not indicate a political or a historical sense. And, indeed, his writings do not show that Browning possessed a political or a historical sense in any high degree, save as a representative person may be conceived by him as embodying a phase of civilisation. When Mrs Trollope called at Casa Guidi, Browning was only reluctantly present; he had written against liberal institutions and against the poetry of Victor Hugo, and that was enough. Might it not have been more truly liberal to be patient and understand the grounds of her prejudice? Blessed be the inconsistency of men!" exclaimed Mrs Browning, for whose sake he tolerated the

[1] Letters of E. B. B., i. 442.

offending authoress until by and by he came to like in her an agreeable woman.

On the anniversary of their wedding day Browning and his wife saw from their window a brilliant procession of grateful and enthusiastic Florentines stream into the Piazza Pitti with banners and *vivas* for the space of three hours and a half. It was the time when the Grand Duke was a patriot and Pio Nono was a liberal. The new helmets and epaulettes of the civic guard proclaimed the glories of genuine freedom. The pleasure of the populace was like that of children, and perhaps it had some serious feeling behind it. The incomparable Grand Duke had granted a liberal constitution, and was led back from the opera to the Pitti by the torchlights of a cheering crowd—"through the dark night a flock of stars seemed sweeping up the piazza." A few months later, and the word of Mrs Browning is "Ah, poor Italy"; the people are attractive, delightful, but they want conscience and self reverence.[1] Browning and she painfully felt that they grew cooler and cooler on the subject of Italian patriotism. A revolution had been promised, but a shower of rain fell and the revolution was postponed. Now it was the Grand Duke *out*, and the bells rang, and a tree of liberty was planted close to the door of Casa Guidi; six weeks later it was the Grand Duke *in*, and the same bells rang, and the tree of liberty was pulled down. The Pope is well-meaning but weak; and before long honorific epithets have to be denied him—he is merely a Pope; his prestige and power over souls is lost. The liberal Grand Duke is transformed into a

[1] To Miss Mitford, August 24, 1848.

Duke decorated with Austrian titles. As for France, Mrs Browning had long since learnt from the books she read with so much delight to feel a debt to the country of Balzac and George Sand. She thought that the unrest and the eager hopes of the French Revolution, notwithstanding its errors, indicated at least the conception of a higher ideal than any known to the English people. Browning did not possess an equal confidence in France; he did not accept her view that the French occupation of Rome was capable of justification; nor did he enter into her growing hero-worship—as yet far from its full development—of Louis Napoleon. Her admiration for Balzac he shared, and it is probable that the death of the great novelist moved him to keener regret than did the death, at no considerable distance of time, of Wordsworth. With French communism or socialism neither husband nor wife, however republican in their faith, had sympathy; they held that its tendency is to diminish the influence of the individual, and that in the end the progress of the mass is dependent on the starting forth from the mass and the striding forward of individual minds. They believed as firmly as did Edmund Burke in the importance of what Burke styles a natural aristocracy.

For four years—from 1847 to 1851—Browning never crossed the confines of Italy. No duties summoned him away, and he was happy in his home. "We are as happy," he wrote in December 1847, "as two owls in a hole, two toads under a tree-stump; or any other queer two poking creatures that we let live after the fashion of their black hearts, only Ba is fat and rosy; yes indeed." In spring they

drove day by day through the Cascine, passing on the way the carven window of the *Statue and the Bust*, and "the stone called Dante's," whereupon

> He used to bring his quiet chair out, turned
> To Brunelleschi's church.[1]

And after tea there was the bridge of Trinità from which to watch the sunsets turning the Arno to pure gold while the moon and the evening-star hung aloft. It was a life of retirement and of quiet work. Mrs Browning mentions to a friend that for fifteen months she could not make her husband spend a single evening out—"not even to a concert, nor to hear a play of Alfieri's," but what with music and books and writing and talking, she adds, "we scarcely know how the days go, it's such a gallop on the grass." The "writing" included the revision and preparation for the press of Browning's *Poems*, in two volumes, which Chapman & Hall, more liberal than Moxon, had undertaken to publish at their own risk, and which appeared in 1849. Some care and thought were also given by Browning to the alterations of text made in the edition of his wife's Poems of the following year; and for a time his own *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* was an absorbing occupation. As to the "reading," the chief disadvantage of Florence towards the middle of the last century was the difficulty of seeing new books of interest, whether French or English. Yet *Vanity Fair* and *The Princess*, *Jane Eyre* and *Modern Painters* somehow found their way to Casa Guidi.[2]

Casa Guidi proper, the Casa Guidi which held the

[1] Casa Guidi Windows, i.

[2] "Jane Eyre" was lent to E. B. B. by Mrs Story.

books and pictures and furniture and graceful knick-knacks chosen by its occupants, who were lovers of beauty, dates only from 1848. Previously they had been satisfied with a furnished apartment. Not long before the unfurnished rooms were hired, a mistake in choosing rooms which suffered from the absence of sunshine and warmth gave Browning an opportunity of displaying what to his wife's eyes appeared to be unexampled magnanimity. The six months' rent was promptly paid, and chambers on the Pitti "yellow with sunshine from morning to evening" were secured. "Any other man, a little lower than the angels," his wife assured Miss Mitford, "would have stamped and sworn a little for the mere relief of the thing, but as to *his* being angry with *me* for any cause, except not eating enough dinner, the sun would turn the wrong way first." It seemed an excellent piece of economy to take the spacious suite of unfurnished rooms in the Via Maggio, now distinguished by the inscription known to all visitors to Florence, which were to be had for twenty-five guineas a year, and which, when furnished, might be let during any prolonged absence for a considerable sum. The temptation of a ground-floor in the Frescobaldi Palace, and a garden bright with camellias, to which Browning for a time inclined, was rejected. At Casa Guidi the double terrace where orange-trees and camellias also might find a place made amends for the garden with its threatening cloud of mosquitoes, "worse than Austrians"; every need of space and height, of warmth and coolness seemed to be met; and it only remained to expend the welcome proceeds of the sale of books in the recreation of gathering together "rococo chairs, spring sofas, carved

bookcases, satin from cardinals' beds and the rest." Before long Browning amused himself in picking up for a few pauls this or that picture, on seeing which an accomplished connoisseur, like Kirkup, would even hazard the name of Cimabue or Ghirlandaio, or if not that of Giotto, then the safer adjective Giottesque.

Although living the life of retirement which his wife's uncertain state of health required, Browning gradually obtained the acquaintance of several interesting persons, of whom Kirkup, who has just been mentioned, was one. "As to Italian society," wrote Mrs Browning, "one may as well take to longing for the evening star, for it seems quite inaccessible." But the name of Elizabeth Barrett, if not yet that of Robert Browning, was a sufficient introduction to cultivated Englishmen and Americans who had made Florence their home. Among the earliest of these acquaintances were the American sculptor Powers, Swedenborgian and spiritualist (a simple and genial man, "with eyes like a wild Indian's, so black and full of light"), and Hillard, the American lawyer, who, in his *Six months in Italy*, described Browning's conversation as "like the poetry of Chaucer," meaning perhaps that it was hearty, fresh, and vigorous, "or like his own poetry simplified and made transparent." "It seems impossible," Hillard goes on, "to think that he can ever grow old." And of Mrs Browning: "I have never seen a human frame which seemed so nearly a transparent veil for a celestial and immortal spirit. She is a soul of fire enclosed in a shell of pearl." A third American friend was one who could bring tidings of Emerson and Hawthorne — Margaret Fuller of "The Dial," now Countess d'Ossoli, "far better than

r writings," says Mrs Browning, ". . . not only alted but *exaltée* in her opinions, yet calm in anner." Her loss, with that of her husband, on eir voyage to America deeply affected Mrs Browning. Was she happy in anything?" asks her sorrowing end. The first person seen on Italian soil when owning and his wife disembarked at Leghorn was e brilliant and erratic Irish priest, "Father Prout" of *raser's Magazine*, who befriended them with good irits and a potion of eggs and port wine when rowning was ill in Florence, and chided Mrs Browning a "bambina" for her needless fears. Charles Lever with the sunniest of faces and cordialest of manners" —animal spirits preponderating a little too much over n energetic intellect—called on them at the Baths Lucca, but the acquaintance did not ripen into iendship. And little Miss Boyle, one of the family of ne Earls of Cork, would come at night, at the hour of nestnuts and mulled wine, to sparkle as vivaciously as ne pine-log that warmed her feet. These, with the Ioppners, known to Shelley and Byron, a French culptress of royalist sympathies, Mlle. de Fauveau, nuch admired by Browning, and one of the grandsons f Goethe, who flits into and out of the scene, were a ompensation for the repulsiveness of certain English olk at Florence who gathered together only for the ivolities, and worse than frivolities, of foreign ayfaring.

In March 1849 joy and sorrow met and mingled n the lives of Browning and his wife. On the ninth f that month a son was born at Casa Guidi, who six eeks later was described by his mother as "a lovely, at, strong child, with double chin and rosy cheeks

and a great wide chest." He was baptised, with t simple Lutheran rites, Robert Wiedemann Barrett—t "Wiedemann" in remembrance of the maiden name Browning's mother. From the first, Browning and h wife, to adopt a phrase from one of her letters, caug up their parental pleasures with a sort of passion.[1] M Browning's letters croon with happiness in the beaut the strength, the intelligence, the kind-hearted dispo tion of her boy. And the boy's father, from the da when he would walk up and down the terrace of Ca Guidi with the infant in his arms to the last days his life, felt to the full the gladness and the repose th came with this strong bondage of his heart. Wh little Wiedemann could frame imperfect speech up his lips he transformed that name into "Penin which abbreviated to "Pen" became serviceable f domesticities. It was a fantastic derivation Nathaniel Hawthorne which connected Penini wi the colossal statue in Florence bearing the name "Apeninno." Flush for a time grew jealous, and n altogether without cause.

But the joy was pursued and overtaken by sorro A few days after the birth of his son came tidings the death of Browning's mother. He had loved h with a rare degree of passion; the sudden reacti from the happiness of his wife's safety and his so birth was terrible; it almost seemed a wrong to l grief to admit into his consciousness the new gladne of the time. In this conflict of emotions his spir and to some extent his health gave way. He cou not think of returning to his father's home witho extreme pain—"It would break his heart," he said, "

[1] *To Miss Mitford*, Feb. 18, 1850.

e his mother's roses over the wall, and the place here she used to lay her scissors and gloves." He nged that his father and sister should quit the home sorrow, and hasten to Florence; but this was not be. As for England, it could not be thought of as uch on his wife's account as his own. Her father held communication with her; supplicating letters remained nnoticed; her brothers were temporarily estranged. Her sister Henrietta had left her former home; having insulted" her father by asking his consent to her arriage with Captain Surtees Cook, she had taken ne matter into her own hands; the deed was done, nd the name of his second undutiful daughter—narried to a person of moderate means and odiously Tractarian views"—was never again to be mentioned n Mr Barrett's presence. England had become for Mrs Browning a place of painful memories, and a entre of present strife which she did not feel herself s yet able to encounter.

The love of wandering, however, when successive ummers came, and Florence was ablaze with sunshine, rew irresistible, and drove Browning and his house-old to seek elsewhere for fresh interests or for cool-ess and repose. In 1848, beguiled by the guide-book, hey visited Fano to find it quivering with heat, "the ery air swooning in the sun." Their reward at Fano vas that picture by Guercino of the guardian angel eaching a child to pray, the thought of which Browning as translated into song:

> We were at Fano, and three times we went
> To sit and see him in his chapel there,
> And drink his beauty to our soul's content
> —My angel with me too.

Ancona, where the poem was written, if its las line is historically true, followed Fano, among whos brown rocks, "elbowing out the purple tides," and brow houses—"an exfoliation of the rock"—they lived for week on fish and cold water. The tour include Rimini and Ravenna, with a return to Florence b Forli and a passage through the Apennines. Nex year—1849—when Pen was a few months old, th drop of gipsy blood in Browning's veins, to which hi wife jestingly refers, tingled but faintly; it was Mr Browning's part to compel him, for the baby's sake an hers, to seek his own good. They visited Spezzia an glanced at the house of Shelley at Lerici; passe through olive woods and vineyards, and rested in " sort of eagle's nest" at the highest habitable point o the Baths of Lucca. Here the baby's great cheek grew rosier; Browning gained in spirits; and his wif was able "to climb the hills and help him to los himself in the forests." When they wandered at noo except for some bare-footed peasant or some mon with the rope around his waist, it was complete solitude and on moonlit nights they sat by the waterfalls i an atmosphere that had the lightness of mountain ai without its keenness. On one occasion they climbe by dry torrent courses five miles into the mountain baby and all, on horseback and donkeyback—"suc a congregation of mountains; looking alive in th stormy light we saw them by." It was certainly blessed transformation of the prostrate invalid in th upper room at Wimpole Street. Setting aside his ow happiness, Browning could feel with regard to her an his deep desire to serve her, that he had seen of th travail of his soul, and in this matter was satisfied.

The weeks at Siena of the year 1850 were not quite so prosperous. During that summer Mrs Browning had been seriously ill. When sufficiently recovered she was carried by her husband to a villa in the midst of vines and olives, a mile and a half or two miles outside Siena, which commanded a noble prospect of hills and plain. At first she could only remain seated in the easy-chair which he found for her in the city. For a day there was much alarm on behalf of the boy, now able to run about, who lay with heavy head and glassy eyes in a half-stupor; but presently he was astir again, and his "singing voice" was heard in the house and garden. Mrs Browning in the fresh yet warm September air regained her strength. Before returning to Florence, they spent a week in the city to see the churches and the pictures by Sodoma. Even little Wiedemann screamed for church-interiors and developed remarkable imitative pietisms of a theatrical kind. "It was as well," said Browning, "to have the eyeteeth and the Puseyistical crisis over together."

This comment, although no more than a passing word spoken in play, gives a correct indication of Browning's feeling, fully shared in by his wife, towards the religious movement in England which was altering the face of the established Church. "Puseyism" was for them a kind of child's play which unfortunately had religion for its play-ground; they viewed it with a superior smile, in which there was more of pity than of anger. Both of them, though one was a writer for the stage and the other could read *Madame Bovary* without flinching and approved the morals of *La Dame aux Camélias*, had their roots in English

Puritanism.[1] And now the time had come wh
Browning was to embody some of his Purita
thoughts and feelings relating to religion in a high
original poem.

- In January 1859, Pen was reading an Italian translation of *Mo
Cristo, and announced, to his father's and mother's amusement, that af
Dumas he would proceed to "papa's favourite book, *Madame Bovary*

Chapter VII

Christmas Eve and Easter Day

CHRISTMAS Eve and Easter Day was published by hapman & Hall in the year 1850. It was reported the author that within the first fortnight two ndred copies had been sold, with which evidence moderate popularity he was pleased; but the initial ccess was not maintained and subsequently the book ecame, like *Sordello*, a "remainder." As early as 845, in the opening days of the correspondence with iss Barrett, when she had called upon her friend to eak as poet in his own person and to speak out, he sured her that whereas hitherto he had only made en and women utter themselves on his behalf and ad given the truth not as pure white light but oken into prismatic hues, now he would try to eclare directly that which was in him. In place of s men and women he would have her to be a comnion in his work, and yet, he adds, "I don't think shall let *you* hear, after all, the savage things about opes and imaginative religions that I must say." 'e can only conjecture as to whether the theme of e poem of 1850 was already in Browning's mind. is wife's influence certainly was not unlikely to inine him towards the choice of a subject which had me immediate relation to contemporary thought. ne knew that poetry to be of permanent value

must do more than reflect a passing fashion; tha in a certain sense it must in its essence be out o time and space, expressing ideas and passions whicl are parts of our abiding humanity. Yet she recog nised an advantage in pressing into what is permanen through the forms which it assumes in the world im mediately around the artist. And even in 1845 th design of such a poem as her own *Aurora Leigh* wa occupying her thoughts; she speaks of her intentio of writing a sort of "novel-poem, running into th midst of our conventions, and rushing into drawing rooms and the like, 'where angels fear to tread' and so, meeting face to face and without mask th Humanity of the age, and speaking the truth as conceive of it out plainly." Browning's poem did no rush into drawing-rooms, but it stepped boldly int churches and conventicles and the lecture-rooms o theological professors.

The spiritual life individual and the spiritual lif corporate—these, to state it in a word, are the sub jects dealt with in the two connected poems of hi new volume; the spiritual life individual is considere in *Easter Day*; the spiritual life corporate in *Christma Eve*. Browning, with the blood of all the Puritans i him, as his wife expressed it, could not undervalu that strain of piety which had descended from th exiles at Geneva and had run on through the struggle for religious liberty in the nonconformist religiou societies of the seventeenth century and the Evan gelical revival of times less remote. Looking aroun him he had seen in his own day the progress of tw remarkable movements—one embodying, or professin to embody, the Catholic as opposed to the Purita

onception of religion, the other a free critical move-
ent, tending to the disintegration of the traditional
ogma of Christianity, yet seeking to preserve and
aintain its ethical and even in part its religious in-
uence. The facts can be put concisely if we say
hat one and the same epoch produced in England the
ermons of Spurgeon, the *Apologia pro vita sua* of
Jewman, and the *Literature and Dogma* of Matthew
rnold. To discuss these three conceptions of religion
dequately in verse would have been impossible even
or the argumentative genius of Dryden, and would
ave converted a work of art into a theological treatise.
But three representative scenes might be painted, and
ome truths of passionate feeling might be flung out
y way of commentary. Such was the design of the
oet of *Christmas Eve*.

To topple over from the sublime to the ridiculous
s not difficult. But the presence of humour might
ave the sublimities from a fall, and Browning had
itherto in his art made but slight and occasional use
f a considerable gift of humour which he possessed.
t was humour not of the highest or finest or subtlest
ind; it was very far from the humour of Shake-
peare or of Cervantes, which felt so profoundly all
he incongruities, majestic, pathetic, and laughable, of
uman nature. But it had a rough vigour of its own;
t was united with a capacity for exact and shrewd
bservation; and if it should ever lead him to play
he part of a satirist, the satire must needs be rather
hat of love than of malice. One who esteemed so
ighly the work of Balzac and of Flaubert might
vell be surmised to have something in his composition
f what we now call the realist in art; and the work

of the realist might serve to sustain and vindicate the idealist's ventures of imaginative faith. The picture of the lath-and-plaster entry of "Mount Zion" and of the pious sheep—duly indignant at the interloper in their midst—who one by one enter the fold, if not worthy of Cervantes or of Shakespeare, is hardly inferior to the descriptive passages of Dickens, and it is touched, in the manner of Dickens, with pity for these rags and tatters of humanity. The night, the black barricade of cloud, the sudden apparition of the moon, the vast double rainbow, and He whose sweepy garment eddies onward, become at once more supernatural and more unquestionably real because sublimity springs out of grotesquerie. Is the vision of the face of Christ an illusion?

> The whole face turned upon me full,
> And I spread myself beneath it,
> As when the bleacher spreads, to seethe it
> In the cleansing sun, his wool,—
> Steeps in the flood of noontide whiteness
> Some defiled, discoloured web—
> So lay I saturate, with brightness.

Is this a phantom or a dream? Well, at least it is certain that the witness has seen with his mortal eyes the fat weary woman, and heard the mighty report of her umbrella, "wry and flapping, a wreck of whalebones." And the fat woman of Mount Zion Chapel, with Love Lane at the back of it, may help us to credit the awful vision of the Lord.

Thus the poem has the imaginative sensuousness which art demands; it is not an argument but a series of vivid experiences, though what is sensuous is here tasked in the service of what is spiritual, and a com-

mentary is added. The central idea of the whole is that where love is, there is Christ; and the Christ of this poem is certainly no abstraction, no moral ideal, no transcendental conception of absolute charity, but very God and very man, the Christ of Nazareth, who dwelt among men, full of grace and truth. Literary criticism which would interpret Browning's meaning in any other sense may be ingenious, but it is not disinterested, and some side-wind blows it far from the mark.

Love with defective knowledge, he maintains, is of more spiritual worth than knowledge with defective love. Desiring to give salience to this idea, he deprives his little pious conventicle of every virtue except one—"love," and no other word is written on each forehead of the worshippers. Browning, the artist and student of art, was not insensible to the spiritual power of beauty; and beauty is conspicuously absent from the praise and prayer that went up from Mount Zion chapel; its forms of worship are burlesque and uncouth. Browning, the lover of knowledge, was not insensible to the value of intelligence in things of religion; and the congregation of Mount Zion sit on "divinely flustered" under

> the pig-of-lead-like pressure
> Of the preaching man's immense stupidity.

The pastor, whose words so sway his enraptured flock, mangles the Holy Scriptures with a fine irreverence, and pours forth his doctrine with an entirely self-satisfied indifference to reason and common sense. Nor has love accomplished its perfect work, for the interloper who stands at the entry is eyed with inquisitorial glances of pious exclusiveness—how has a

Gallio such as he ventured to take his station among the elect? Matthew Arnold, had he visited Mount Zion, might have discoursed with a charmingly insolent urbanity on the genius for ugliness in English dissent and the supreme need of bringing a current of new ideas to play upon the unintelligent use of its traditional formulæ. And Matthew Arnold would have been right. These are the precise subjects of Browning's somewhat rough-and-ready satire. But Browning adds that in Mount Zion, love, at least in its rudiments, is present, and where love is, there is Christ.

Of English nonconformity in its humblest forms Browning can write, as it were, from within; he writes of Roman Catholic forms of worship as one who stands outside; his sympathy with the prostrate multitude in St Peter's at Rome is of an impersonal kind founded rather upon the recognition of an objective fact than springing from an instinctive feeling. For a moment he is carried away by the tide of their devout enthusiasms; but he recovers himself to find indeed that love is also here and therefore Christ is present, but the worshippers fallen under "Rome's gross yoke," are very infants in their need of these sacred buffooneries and posturings and petticoatings for infants

> Peevish as ever to be suckled,
> Lulled with the same old baby-prattle
> With intermixture of the rattle.

And this, though the time has come when love would have them no longer infantile, but capable of standing and walking, "not to speak of trying to climb." Such a short and easy method of dealing with Roman

Catholic dogma and ritual cannot be commended for its intelligence; it is quite possible to be on the same side as Browning without being as crude as he in misconception. He does not seriously consider the Catholic idea which regards things of sense as made luminous by the spirit of which they are the envoys and the ministers. It is enough for him to declare his own creed which treats any intermediary between the human soul and the Divine as an obstruction or a veil:

> My heart does best to receive in meekness
> That mode of worship, as most to his mind,
> Where earthly aids being left behind,
> His All in All appears serene
> With the thinnest human veil between,
> Letting the mystic lamps, the seven,
> The many motions of his spirit,
> Pass as they list to earth from heaven.

This was the creed of Milton and of Bunyan; and yet with both Milton and Bunyan the imagery of the senses is employed as the means not of concealing but revealing the things of the spirit.

From the lecture-room of Göttingen, with its destructive and reconstructive criticism, Browning is even farther removed than he is from the ritualisms of the Roman basilica. Yet no caricature can be more amiable than his drawing of the learned Professor, so gentle in his aspect, so formidable in his conclusions, who, gazing into the air with a pure abstracted look, proceeds in a grave sweet voice to exhibit and analyse the sources of the myth of Christ. In the Professor's lecture-room Browning finds intellect indeed but only the shadow of love. He argues that if the "myth" of Christ be dissolved, the authority of Christ as a

teacher disappears; Christ is even inferior to other moralists by virtue of the fact that He made personal claims which cannot be sustained. And whatever may be Christ's merit as a teacher of the truth, the motive to action which His life and words supplied must cease to exist if it be shown that the divine sacrifice of God manifest in the flesh is no more than a figment of the devout imagination. At every point the criticism of Browning is as far apart as it is possible to conceive from the criticism set forth in the later writings of Matthew Arnold. The one writer regards the "myth" as no more than the grave-clothes of a risen Christ whose essential virtue lies in his sweet reasonableness and his morality touched with enthusiasm. The other believes that if the wonderful story of love be proved a fable, a profound alteration—and an alteration for the worse—has been made in the religious consciousness of Christendom. And undoubtedly the difference between the supernatural and the natural theories of Christianity is far greater than Arnold represented it to be. But Browning at this date very inadequately conceived the power of Christ as a revealer of the fatherhood of God. In that revelation, whether the Son of God was human or divine, lay a truth of surpassing power, and a motive of action capable of summoning forth the purest and highest energies of the soul. That such is the case has been abundantly evidenced by the facts of history. Browning finds only much learning and the ghost of dead love in the Göttingen lecture-room; and of course it was easy to adapt his Professor's lecture so as to arrive at this conclusion. But the process and the conclusion are alike unjust.

Having traversed the various forms of Christian faith and scepticism, the speaker in *Christmas Eve* declines into a mood of lazy benevolence and mild indifferentism towards each and all of these. Has not Christ been present alike at the holding-forth of the poor dissenting son of thunder, who tore God's word into shreds, at the tinklings and posturings and incense-fumes of Roman pietism, and even at the learned discourse which dissolved the myth of his own life and death? Why, then, over-strenuously take a side? Why not regard all phases of belief or no-belief with equal and serene regard? Such a mood of amiable indifferentism is abhorrent to Browning's feelings. The hem of Christ's robe passes wholly at this point from the hand of the seer of visions in his poem. One best way of worship there needs must be; ours may indeed not be the absolutely best, but it is our part, it is our probation to see that we strive earnestly after what is best; yes, and strive with might and main to confer upon our fellows the gains which we have found. It may be God's part—we trust it is—to bring all wanderers to the one fold at last. As for us, we must seek after Him and find Him in the mode required by our highest thought, our purest passion. Here Browning speaks from his central feeling. Only, we may ask, what if one's truest self lie somewhere hidden amid a thousand hesitating sympathies? And is not the world spacious enough to include a Montaigne as well as a Pascal or a Browning? Assuredly the world without its Montaigne would be a poorer and a less hospitable dwelling-place for the spirits of men.

Mrs Browning complained to her husband of what she terms the asceticism of *Easter Day*, the second part of his volume of 1850; his reply was that it stated "one side of the question." "Don't think," Mrs Browning says, "that he has taken to the cilix—indeed he has not—but it is his way to *see* things as passionately as other people *feel* them." *Easter Day* has nothing to say of religious life in Churches and societies, nothing of the communities of public worship. For the writer of this poem only three things exist—God, the individual soul, and the world regarded as the testing place and training place of the soul. Browning has here a rigour of moral or spiritual earnestness which may be called, by any one who so pleases, Puritan in its kind and its intensity; he feels the need, if we are to attain any approximation to the Christian ideal, of the lit lamp and the girt loin. Two difficulties in the Christian life in particular he chooses to consider—first, the difficulty of faith in the things of the spirit, and especially in what he regards as the essential parts of the Christian story; and secondly, the difficulty of obeying the injunction to renounce the world. That we cannot grow to our highest attainment by the old method enjoined by pagan philosophy—that of living according to nature, he regards as evident, for nature itself is warped and marred; it groans and travails, and from its discords how shall we frame a harmony? It was always his habit of mind, he tells us, from his childhood onwards, to face a danger and confront a doubt, and if there were anywhere a lurking fear, to draw this forth from its hiding-place and examine it in the light, even at the risk of some mortal ill. Therefore he will press for an answer

to his present questionings; he will try conclusions to the uttermost.

As to the initial difficulty of faith, Browning with a touch of scorn, assures us that evidences of spiritual realities, evidences of Christianity—as they are styled—external and internal will be readily found by him who desires to find; convincing enough they are for him who wants to be convinced. But in truth faith is a noble venture of the spirit, an aspiring effort towards what is best, even though what is best may never be attained. The mole gropes blindly in unquestionably solid clay; better be like the grasshopper "that spends itself in leaps all day to reach the sun." A grasshopper's leap sunwards—that is what we signify by this word "faith."

But the difficulties of the Christian life only shift their place when faith by whatever means has been won. We are bidden to renounce the world: what does the injunction mean? in what way shall it be obeyed? "Ascetic" Mrs Browning named this poem; and ascetic it is if by that word we understand the counselling and exhorting to a noble exercise and discipline; but Browning even in his poem by no means wears the cilix, and no teaching can be more fatal than his to asceticism in the narrower sense of the word. To renounce the world, if interpreted aright, is to extinguish or suppress no faculty that has been given to man, but rather to put each faculty to its highest uses:

> "Renounce the world!"—Ah, were it done
> By merely cutting one by one
> Your limbs off, with your wise head last,
> How easy were it!—how soon past,
> If once in the believing mood.

The harder and the higher renunciation is this—to choose the things of the spirit rather than the things of sense, and again in accepting, as means of our earthly discipline and development, the things of sense to press through these to the things of the spirit which lie behind and beyond and above them.

Such, and such alone, is the asceticism to which Browning summons his disciple; it is the asceticism of energy not that of atrophy; it does not starve the senses, but reinforces the spirit; it results not in a cloistered but a militant virtue. A certain self-denial it may demand, but the self-denial becomes the condition of a higher joy. And if life with its trials frays the flesh, what matters it when the light of the spirit shines through with only a fuller potency? In the choice between sense and spirit, or, to put it more generally, in the choice between what is higher and less high, lies the probation of a soul, and also its means of growth. And what is the meaning of this mortal life—this strange phenomenon otherwise so unintelligible—if it be not the moment in which a soul is proved, the period in which a soul is shaped and developed for other lives to come?

To forget that Browning is a preacher may suit a dainty kind of criticism which detaches the idea of beauty from the total of our humanity addressed by the greater artists. But the solemn thoughts that are taken up by beauty in such work, for example, as that of Michael Angelo, are an essential element or an essential condition of its peculiar character as a thing of beauty. And armour, we know, may be as lovely to the mere senses as a flower. Browning's doctrine may sometimes protrude gauntly through his poetry;

but at his best—as in *Rabbi ben Ezra* or *Abt Vogler* —the thought of the poem is needful in the dance of lyrical enthusiasm, as the male partner who takes hands with beauty, and to separate them would bring the dance to a sudden close. Both are present in *Easter Day*, and we must watch the movement of the two. In a passage already quoted from *Christmas Eve* the face of Christ is nobly imagined as the sun which bleaches a discoloured web. Here the poet's imagination is as intense in its presentation of Christ the doomsman :

> He stood there. Like the smoke
> Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke—
> I saw Him. One magnific pall
> Mantled in massive fold and fall
> His head, and coiled in snaky swathes
> About His feet ; night's black, that bathes
> All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
> Against the soul of blackness there.
> A gesture told the mood within—
> That wrapped right hand which based the chin,—
> That intense meditation fixed
> On His procedure,—pity mixed
> With the fulfilment of decree.
> Motionless thus, He spoke to me,
> Who fell before His feet, a mass,
> No man now.

The picture of the final conflagration of the Judgment Day is perhaps over-laboured, a descriptive *tour de force*, horror piled upon horror with accumulative power, —a picture somewhat too much in the manner of Martin; and the verse does not lend itself to the sustained sublimity of terror. The glow of Milton's hell is intenser, and Milton's majestic instrumentation alone could render the voices of its flames. The real awfulness

of Browning's Judgment Day dwells wholly in the inner experiences of a solitary soul. The speaker finds of a sudden that the doom is upon him, and that in the probation of life his choice was earth, not heaven. The sentence pronounced upon him is in accordance with the election of his own will—let earth, with all its beauty of nature, all its gifts of human art, all its successes of the intellect, as he had conceived and chosen them, be his. To his despair, he finds that what he had prized in life, and what is now granted to him cannot bring him happiness or even content. The plenitude of beauty, of which all partial beauty was but a pledge, is forever lost to him. The glory of art, which lay beyond its poor actual attainments, is lost. The joy of knowledge, with all those

> grasps of guess
> Which pull the more into the less,

is lost. And as to earth's best possession—love—had he ever made a discovery through human love of that which it forthshadows—the love that is perfect and divine? Earth is no longer earth to the doomed man, but the star of the god Rephan of which we read in one of Browning's latest poems; in the horror of its blank and passionless uniformity, untroubled by any spiritual presences, he cowers at the Judge's feet and prays for darkness, hunger, toil, distress, if only hope be also granted him:

> Then did the form expand, expand—
> I knew Him through the dread disguise
> As the whole God within his eyes
> Embraced me.

The Doomsman has in a moment become the Saviour. In all this, if Browning has the burden

of a prophecy to utter, he utters it, after the manner of earlier prophets, as a vision. His art is sensuous and passionate; his argument is transformed into a series of imaginative experiences.

Mrs Browning's illness during the summer and early autumn of 1850 left her for a time more shaken in health than she had been since her marriage. But by the spring of the following year she had recovered strength; and designs of travel were formed, which should include Rome, North Italy, Switzerland, the Rhine, Brussels, Paris and London. Almost at the moment of starting for Rome at the end of April, the plans were altered; the season was too far advanced for going south; ways and means must be economised; Rome might be postponed for a future visit; and Venice would make amends for the present sacrifice. And Venice in May and early June did indeed for a time make amends. "I have been between heaven and earth," Mrs Browning wrote, "since our arrival at Venice." The rich architecture, the colour, the moonlight, the music, the enchanting silence made up a unity of pleasures like nothing that she had previously known. When evening came she and her husband would follow the opera from their box hired for "two shillings and eightpence English," or sit under the moon in the piazza of St. Mark sipping coffee and reading the French papers. But as the month went by, Browning lost appetite and lost sleep. The "soothing, lulling, rocking atmosphere" which suited Mrs Browning made him, after the first excitement of delight, grow nervous and dispirited. They hastened away to Padua, drove to Arqua, "for Petrarch's sake," passed

through Brescia in a flood of white moonlight, and having reached Milan climbed—the invalid of Wimpole Street and her husband—to the topmost point of the cathedral. From the Italian lakes they crossed by the St Gothard to Switzerland, and omitting part of their original scheme of wandering, journeyed in twenty-four hours without stopping from Strasburg to Paris.

In Paris they loitered for three weeks. Mrs Browning during the short visit which followed her marriage had hardly seen the city. Bright shop-windows, before which little Wiedemann would scream with pleasure, restaurants and dinners *à la carte*, full-foliaged trees and gardens in the heart of the town were a not unwelcome exchange for Italian church-interiors and altar-pieces. Even "disreputable prints and fascinating hats and caps" were appreciated as proper to the genius of the place, and the writer of *Casa Guidi Windows* had the happiness of seeing her hero, M. le Président, "in a cocked hat, and with a train of cavalry, passing like a rocket along the boulevards to an occasional yell from the Red." By a happy chance they lighted in Paris upon Tennyson, now Poet-laureate, whom Mrs Browning had hitherto known only through his poems; he was in the friendliest mood, and urged that they should make use of his house and servants during their stay in England, an offer which was not refused, though there was no intention of actually taking advantage of the kindness. As for England, the thought of it, with her father's heart and her father's door closed against her, was bitter as wormwood to Mrs Browning. "It's only Robert," she wrote, "who is a patriot now, of us two."

English soil as they stepped ashore was a puddle, and English air a fog. London lodgings were taken at 26 Devonshire Street, and, although Mrs Browning suffered from the climate, they were soon dizzied and dazzled by the whirl of pleasant hospitalities. An evening with Carlyle ("one of the greatest sights in England"), a dinner given by Forster at Thames Ditton, "in sight of the swans," a breakfast with Rogers, daily visits of Barry Cornwall, cordial companionship of Mrs Jameson, a performance by the Literary Guild actors, a reading of *Hamlet* by Fanny Kemble—with these distractions and such as these the two months flew quickly. It was in some ways a relief when Pen's faithful maid Wilson went for a fortnight to see her kinsfolk, and Mrs Browning had to take her place and substitute for social racketing domestic cares. The one central sorrow remained and in some respects was intensified. She had written to her father, and Browning himself wrote—"a manly, true, straightforward letter," she informs a friend, ". . . everywhere generous and conciliating." A violent and unsparing reply was made, and with it came all the letters that his undutiful daughter had written to Mr Barrett; not one had been read or opened. He returned them now, because he had not previously known how he could be relieved of the obnoxious documents. "God takes it all into his own hands," wrote Mrs Browning, "and I wait." Something, however, was gained; her brothers were reconciled; Arabella Barrett was constant in kindness; and Henrietta journeyed from Taunton to London to enjoy a week in her company.

It was at Devonshire Street that Bayard Taylor, the distinguished American poet and critic, made the

acquaintance of the Brownings, and the record of his visit gives a picture of Browning at the age of thirty-nine, so clearly and firmly drawn that it ought not to be omitted here: "In a small drawing-room on the first floor I met Browning, who received me with great cordiality. In his lively, cheerful manner, quick voice, and perfect self-possession, he made the impression of an American rather than an Englishman. He was then, I should judge, about thirty-seven years of age, but his dark hair was already streaked with gray about the temples. His complexion was fair, with perhaps the faintest olive tinge, eyes large, clear, and gray, nose strong and well cut, mouth full and rather broad, and chin pointed, though not prominent. His forehead broadened rapidly upwards from the outer angle of the eyes, slightly retreating. The strong individuality which marks his poetry was expressed not only in his face and head, but in his whole demeanour. He was about the medium height, strong in the shoulders, but slender at the waist, and his movements expressed a combination of vigour and elasticity." Mrs Browning with her slight figure, pale face, shaded by chestnut curls, and grave eyes of bluish gray, is also described; and presently entered to the American visitor Pen, a blue-eyed, golden-haired boy, who babbled his little sentences in Italian.

When, towards the close of September, Browning and his wife left London for Paris, Carlyle by his own request was their companion on the journey. Mrs Browning feared that his irritable nerves would suffer from the vivacities of little Pen, but it was not so; he accepted with good humour the fact that the small boy had not yet learned, like his own Teufelsdröckh,

the Eternal No: "Why, sir," exclaimed Carlyle, "you have as many aspirations as Napoleon!"[1] At Dieppe, Browning, as Carlyle records, "did everything, fought for us, and we—that is, the woman, the child and I—had only to wait and be silent." At Paris in the midst of "a crowding, jangling, vociferous tumult, the brave Browning fought for us, leaving me to sit beside the woman." An apartment was found on the sunny side of the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, "pretty, cheerful, carpeted rooms," far brighter and better than those of Devonshire Street, and when, to Browning's amusement, his wife had moved every chair and table into the new and absolutely right position, they could rest and be thankful. Carlyle spent several evenings with them, and repaid the assistance which he received in various difficulties from Browning's command of the language, by picturesque conversations in his native speech: "You come to understand perfectly," wrote Mrs Browning, "when you know him, that his bitterness is only melancholy, and his scorn sensibility." A little later Browning's father and sister spent some weeks in Paris. Here, at all events, were perfect relations between the members of a family group; the daughter here was her father's comrade with something even of a maternal instinct; and the grandfather discovered to his great satisfaction that his own talent for drawing had descended to his grandchild.

The time was one when the surface of life in Paris showed an unruffled aspect; but under the surface were heavings of inward agitation. On the morning of December 2nd the great stroke against the Republic was delivered; the *coup d'état* was an accomplished

[1] "Mrs Orr's Life and Letters of R. B.," 173.

fact. Later in the day Louis Napoleon rode under the windows of the apartment in the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, from the Carrousel to the Arc de l'Étoile. To Mrs Browning it seemed the grandest of spectacles —"he rode there in the name of the people after all." She and her husband had witnessed revolutions in Florence, and political upheavals did not seem so very formidable. On the Thursday of bloodshed in the streets—December 4th—Pen was taken out for his usual walk, though not without certain precautions; as the day advanced the excitement grew tense, and when night fell the distant firing on the boulevards kept Mrs Browning from her bed till one o'clock. On Saturday they took a carriage and drove to see the field of action; the crowds moved to and fro, discussing the situation, but of real disturbance there was none; next day the theatres had their customary spectators and the Champs-Elysées its promenaders. For the dishonoured "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité," as Mrs Browning heard it suggested, might now be inscribed "Infanterie, Cavallerie, Artillerie."

Such may have been her husband's opinion, but such was not hers. Her faith in the President had been now and again shaken; her faith in the Emperor became as time went on an enthusiasm of hero-worship. The display of force on December 2nd impressed her imagination; there was a dramatic completeness in the whole performance; Napoleon represented the people; a democrat, she thought, should be logical and thorough; the vote of the millions entirely justified their chief. Browning viewed affairs more critically more sceptically. "Robert and I," writes his wife jestingly, "have had some domestic *émeutes*, because

he hates some imperial names." He detested all Buonapartes, he would say, past, present, and to come, —an outbreak explained by Mrs Browning to her satisfaction, as being only his self-willed way of dismissing a subject with which he refused to occupy his thoughts, a mere escapade of feeling and known to him as such. When all the logic and good sense were on the woman's side, how could she be disturbed by such masculine infirmities? Though only a very little lower than the angels, he was after all that humorous being—a man.

Chapter VIII

1851 to 1855

It was during the month of the *coup d'état* that Browning went back in thought to the poet of his youthful love, and wrote that essay which was prefixed to the volume of forged letters published as Shelley's by Moxon in 1852. The essay is interesting as Browning's only considerable piece of prose, and also as an utterance made not through the mask of any *dramatis persona*, but openly and directly from his own lips. Though not without value as a contribution to the study of Shelley's genius, it is perhaps chiefly of importance as an exposition of some of Browning's own views concerning his art. He distinguishes between two kinds or types of poet: the poet who like Shakespeare is primarily the "fashioner" of things independent of his own personality, artistic creations which embody some fact or reality, leaving it to others to interpret, as best they are able, its significance; and secondly the poet who is rather a "seer" than a fashioner, who attempts to exhibit in imaginative form his own conceptions of absolute truth, conceptions far from entire adequacy, yet struggling towards completeness; the poet who would shadow forth, as he himself apprehends them, *Ideas*, to use the word of Plato, "seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand"—which Ideas he discovers not so often in the

external world as in his own soul, this being for him the nearest reflex of the absolute Mind." What a poet of this second kind produces, as Browning finely states it, will be less a work than an effluence. He is attracted among external phenomena chiefly by those which summon forth his inner light and power; "he selects that silence of the earth and sea in which he can best hear the beating of his individual heart, and leaves the noisy, complex, yet imperfect exhibitions of nature in the manifold experience of man around him, which serve only to distract and suppress the working of his brain." To this latter class of poets, although in *The Cenci* and *Julian and Maddalo* he is eminent as a "fashioner," Shelley conspicuously belongs. Mankind cannot wisely dispense with the services of either type of poet; at one time it chiefly needs to have that which is already known interpreted into its highest meanings; and at another, when the virtue of these interpretations has been appropriated and exhausted, it needs a fresh study and exploration of the facts of life and nature—for "the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned." The truest and highest point of view from which to regard the poetry of Shelley is that which shows it as a "sublime fragmentary essay towards a presentment of the correspondency of the universe to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual, and of the actual to the ideal."

For Browning the poet of *Prometheus Unbound* was not that beautiful and ineffectual angel of Matthew Arnold's fancy, beating in the void his luminous wings. A great moral purpose looked forth from Shelley's work, as it does, Browning would add, from all lofty

works of art. And it may be remarked that the criticism of Browning's own writings which considers not only their artistic methods and artistic success or failure, but also their ethical and spiritual purport, is entirely in accord with his thoughts in this essay. Far from regarding Shelley as unpractical, he notes—and with perfect justice—"the peculiar practicalness" of Shelley's mind, which in his earlier years acted injuriously upon both his conduct and his art. His power to perceive the defects of society was accompanied by as precocious a fertility to contrive remedies; but his crudeness in theorising and his inexperience in practice resulted in not a few youthful errors. Gradually he left behind him "this low practical dexterity"; gradually he learnt that "the best way of removing abuses is to stand fast by truth. Truth is one, as they are manifold; and innumerable negative effects are produced by the upholding of one positive principle." Browning urges that Shelley, before the close, had passed from his doctrinaire atheism to what was virtually a theistic faith. "I shall say what I think," he adds—"had Shelley lived he would have finally ranged himself with the Christians. . . . The preliminary step to following Christ is the leaving the dead to bury their dead." Perhaps this hypothetical anticipation is to be classed with the surmise of Cardinal Wiseman (if Father Prout rightly attributed to that eminent ecclesiastic a review of *Men and Women* in *The Rambler*) that Browning himself would one day be found in the ranks of converts to Catholicism. In each case a wish was father to the thought. Browning recognised the fact that Shelley assigned a place to love, side by side with power, among the

•rces which determine the life and development of umanity, and with Browning himself "power" was a ynonym for the Divine will, and "love" was often an quivalent for God manifest in Jesus Christ. One or vo other passages of the essay may be noted as lustrating certain characteristics of the writer's modes f thought and feeling: "Everywhere is apparent helley's belief in the existence of Good, to which Evil is an accident"—it is an optimist here, though f a subtler doctrine than Shelley's, who is applauding ptimism. "Shelley was tender, though tenderness is ot always the characteristic of very sincere natures; e was eminently both tender and sincere." Was Browning consulting his own heart, which was always incere, and could be tender, but whose tenderness ometimes disappeared in explosions of indignant rath? The principle, again, by which he determined n artist's rank is in harmony with Browning's general eeling that men are to be judged less by their actual chievements than by the possibilities that lie unfolded ithin them, and the ends to which they aspire, even hough such ends be unattained: "In the hierarchy f creative minds, it is the presence of the highest aculty that gives first rank, in virtue of its kind, not egree; no pretension of a lower nature, whatever the ompleteness of development or variety of effect, mpeding the precedency of the rarer endowment hough only in the germ." And, last, of the tardy ecognition of Shelley's genius as a poet, Browning rote in words which though, as he himself says, he ad always good praisers, no doubt express a thought hat helped to sustain him against the indifference of he public to his poetry: "The misapprehensiveness of

his age is exactly what a poet is sent to remedy: an the interval between his operation and the generall perceptible effect of it, is no greater, less indeed tha in many other departments of the great human effor The 'E pur si muove' of the astronomer was as bitte a word as any uttered before or since by a poet ove his rejected living work, in that depth of convictio which is so like despair." The volume in whic Browning's essay appeared was withdrawn fro circulation on the discovery of the fraudulent natur of its contents. He had himself no opportunity o inspecting the forged manuscripts, and no question o authenticity was raised until several copies of the boo had passed into circulation.[1]

During the nine months spent in Paris, fro September 1851 to June 1852, Browning enlarge the circle of his friends and made some new an interesting acquaintances. Chief among friendship was that with Joseph Milsand of Dijon, whose nam is connected with *Sordello* in the edition of Browning' "Poetical Works" of the year 1863. Under the titl "La Poésie Anglaise depuis Byron," two articles b Milsand were contributed to the "Revue des Deu Mondes," the first on Tennyson, the second (publishe 15th August 1851) a little before the poet's arrival i Paris, on Robert Browning. "Of all the poets know to me," wrote his French critic, "he is the most capabl of summing up the conceptions of the religion, th ethics, and the theoretic knowledge of our period i forms which embody the beauty proper to such ab stractions." Such criticism by a thoughtful studen

[1] Browning's Essay on Shelley was reprinted by Dr Furnivall in "Th Browning Society's Papers," 1881-84, Part I.

f our literature could not but prepare the way leasantly for personal acquaintance. Milsand, we re told by his friend Th. Bentzon (Mme. Blanc), aving hesitated as to the propriety of printing a assage in an article as yet unpublished, in which he ad spoken of the great sorrow of Mrs Browning's arly life—the death of her brother, went straight to rowning, who was then in Paris, and declared that he as ready to cancel what he had written if it would ause her pain. "Only a Frenchman," exclaimed rowning, grasping both hands of his visitor, "would ave done this." So began a friendship of an intimate nd most helpful kind, which closed only with Milsand's eath in 1886. To his memory is dedicated the olume published soon after his death, *Parleyings ith certain People of Importance.* "I never knew or hall know his like among men," wrote Browning; nd again: "No words can express the love I have or him." And in *Red Cotton Nightcap Country* it is Milsand who is characterised in the lines:

> He knows more and loves better than the world
> That never heard his name and never may. . . .
> What hinders that my heart relieve itself,
> O friend! who makest warm my wintry world,
> And wise my heaven, if there we consort too.

n the correction of Browning's proof-sheets, and specially in regulating the punctuation of his poems, Milsand's friendly services were of high value. In 858 when Browning happened to be at Dijon, and ad reason to believe, though in fact erroneously, hat his friend was absent in Paris, he went twice "in passion of friendship," as his wife tells a correspon-

dent, to stand before Maison Milsand, and muse, an bless the threshold.[1]

Browning desired much to know Victor Hugo, bu his wish was never gratified. After December 2n Paris could not contain a spirit so fiery as Hugo was in hostility to the new régime and its chie representative. Balzac, whom it would have bee a happiness even to look at, was dead. Lamartin promised a visit, but for a time his coming wa delayed. By a mischance Alfred de Musset faile to appear when Browning, expecting to meet him, wa the guest of M. Buloz. But Béranger was to be see "in his white hat wandering along the asphalte." Th blind historian Thierry begged Browning and his wif to call upon him. At the house of Ary Scheffer, th painter, they heard Mme. Viardot sing; and reception given by Lady Elgin and Mme. Mohl were means c introduction to much that was interesting in the socia life of Paris. At the theatre they saw with th deepest excitement "La Dame aux Camélias," whic was running its hundred nights. Caricatures in th streets exhibited the occupants of the pit protected b umbrellas from the rain of tears that fell from th boxes. Tears, indeed, ran down Browning's cheek though he had believed himself hardened against theatri cal pathos. Mrs Browning cried herself ill, and pro nounced the play painful but profoundly moral.

Mrs Browning's admiration of the writings c George Sand was so great that it would have been sore disappointment to her if George Sand were t prove inaccessible. A letter of introduction to he

[1] Letters of E. B. B. ii. 284. On Milsand, the article "A French frien of Browning," by Th. Bentzon, is valuable and interesting.

ad been obtained from Mazzini. "Ah, I am so vexed bout George Sand," Mrs Browning wrote on Christ-nas Eve; "she came, she has gone, and we haven't net." In February she again was known to be for a ew days in Paris; Browning was not eager to push hrough difficulties on the chance of obtaining an nterview, but his wife was all impatience: "'No,' said , 'you *shan't* be proud, and I *won't* be proud, and we *vill* see her. I won't die, if I can help it, without eeing George Sand.'" A gracious reply and an ppointment came in response to their joint-petition vhich accompanied Mazzini's letter. On the appointed Sunday Browning and Mrs Browning—she wearing a espirator and smothered in furs—drove to render heir thanks and homage to the most illustrious of Frenchwomen. Mrs Browning with beating heart tooped and kissed her hand. They found in George Sand's face no sweetness, but great moral and intel-ectual capacities; in manners and conversation she vas absolutely simple. Young men formed the company, to whom she addressed counsel and com-nand with the utmost freedom and a conscious uthority. Through all her speech a certain under-current of scorn, a half-veiled touch of disdain, was perceptible. At their parting she invited the English visitors to come again, kissed Mrs Browning on the ips, and received Browning's kiss upon her hand. The second call upon her was less agreeable. She sat varming her feet in a circle of eight or nine ill-bred nen, representatives of "the ragged Red diluted with he lower theatrical." If any other mistress of a nouse had behaved so unceremoniously, Browning declared that he would have walked out of the room,

and Mrs Browning left with the impression—"she does not care for me." They had exerted themselves to please her, but felt that it was in vain; "we couldn't penetrate, couldn't really *touch* her." Once Browning met her near the Tuileries and walked the length of the gardens with her arm upon his. If nothing further was to come of it, at least they had seen a wonderful piece of work, which not to have been blest withal would have discredited their travel. Only to Mrs Browning's mortification the spectacle wanted one detail indispensable to its completeness—the characteristic cigarette was absent: "Ah, but I didn't see her smoke." (Life leaves us always something to desire.

Before the close of June 1852 they were again in London, and found comfortable rooms at 58 Welbeck Street. When the turmoil of the first days had subsided, they visited "Kenyon the Magnificent"—so named by Browning—at Wimbledon, at whose table Landor, abounding in life and passionate energy as in earlier days, was loud in his applause of the genius of Louis Napoleon. Mazzini, his "intense eyes full of melancholy illusions," called at their lodgings in company with Mrs Carlyle, who seemed to Mrs Browning not only remarkable for her play of ideas but attaching through her feelings and her character.[1] Florence Nightingale was also a welcome visitor, and her visit was followed by a gift of flowers. Invitations

[1] Mrs Orr says that Browning always thought Mrs Carlyle "a hard and unlovable woman"; she adds, "I believe little liking was lost between them." Mrs Ritchie, in her "Records of Tennyson, Ruskin, and Browning" (pp. 250, 251), tells with spirit the story of Browning and Mrs Carlyle's kettle, which, on being told to "put it down," in an absent mood he planted upon her new carpet. "Ye should have been more explicit," said Carlyle to his wife.

rom country houses came in sheaves, and the thought f green fields is seductive in a London month of July ; ut to remain in London was to be faithful to Penini —and to the much-travelled Flush. Once the whole ousehold, with Flush included, breathed rural air for wo days with friends at Farnham, and Browning had here the pleasure of meeting Charles Kingsley, whose Christian Socialism seemed wild and unpractical nough, but as for the man himself, brave, bold, riginal, full of a genial kindliness, Mrs Browning ssures a correspondent that he could not be other han "good and noble let him say or dream what he ill." It is stated by Mr W. M. Rossetti that Brown- ng first became acquainted with his brother Dante Gabriel in the course of this summer. Coventry Patmore gave him the manuscript of his unpublished oems of 1853 to read. And Ruskin was now added o the number of his personal acquaintances. "We vent to Denmark Hill yesterday, by agreement," vrote Mrs Browning in September, "to see the Turners—which, by the way, are divine. I like Mr Ruskin much, and so does Robert. Very gentle, yet arnest—refined and truthful." At Lord Stanhope's hey were introduced to the latest toy of fashionable ccultism, the crystal ball, in which the seer beheld Oremus, the spirit of the sun ; the supernatural was ualified for the faithful with luncheon and lobster alad ; "I love the marvellous," Mrs Browning frankly eclares. And of terrestrial wonders, with heaven ying about them, and also India muslin and Brussels ace, two were seen in the babies of Monckton Milnes nd Alfred Tennyson. Pen, because he was "troppo rande," declined to kiss the first of these new-

christened wonders, but Pen's father, who went alone t the baptism of Hallam Tennyson, distinguished himse by nursing for some ten minutes and with accomplishe dexterity, the future Governor-General of Australia.

Yet with all these distractions, perhaps in par because of them, the visit to England was not one o Browning's happiest times. The autumn weathe confined Mrs Browning to her rooms. He wa anxious, vexed, and worn.[1] It was a happiness whe Welbeck Street was left behind, and they were on th way by Paris to their resting-place at Casa Guidi From a balcony overlooking one of the Pari boulevards they witnessed, in a blaze of autumna sunshine, which glorified much military and civi pomp, the reception of the new Emperor. Mr Browning's handkerchief waved frantically while sh prayed that God might bless the people in this th chosen representative of a democracy. What wer Browning's thoughts on that memorable Saturday i not recorded, but we may be sure that they were les enthusiastic. Yet he enjoyed the stir and animatio of Paris, and after the palpitating life of the boulevard found Florence dull and dead—no change, no variety The journey by the Mont Cenis route had not bee without its trying incidents. At Genoa, during severa days he was deeply depressed by the illness of hi wife, who lay on the sofa and seemed to waste away But Casa Guidi was reached at last, where it was mor like summer than November; the pleasant nest ha its own peculiar welcome for wanderers; again they en joyed the sunsets over the Arno, and Mrs Browning wa able to report herself free from cough and feeling ver

[1] See Letters of E. B. B. ii. 127.

ell and very happy: "You can't think how we have ught up our ancient traditions just where we left them, nd relapsed into our former soundless, stirless, hermit fe. Robert has not passed an evening from home nce we came—just as if we had never known Paris."[1]

The political condition of Italy was, indeed, a grief both husband and wife. It was a state of utter rostration—on all sides "the unanimity of despair." he Grand Duke, the emancipator, had acquired a espect and affection for the bayonets of Austria. he Pope was "wriggling his venom into the heart of l possibilities of free-thought and action." Browning roaned "How long, O Lord, how long?" His ome-thoughts of England in contrast with Italy were nose of patriotism and pride. His wife was more etached, more critical towards her native land. The est symptom for Italian freedom was that if Italy ad not energy to act, she yet had energy to hate. o be happy now they both must turn to imagi- ative work, and gain all the gains possible from rivate friendships. Browning was already oc- upied with the poems included afterwards in ne volumes of *Men and Women*. Mrs Browning as already engaged upon *Aurora Leigh*. "We either of us show our work to one another," she rote, "till it is finished. An artist must, I fancy, ither find or *make* a solitude to work in, if it is to be ood work at all." But as her husband's poems, one y one, were completed, she saw them, and they eemed to her as fine as anything he had done. Away in England *Colombe's Birthday* was given on ne stage, with Helen Faucit in the leading part.

[1] Letters of E. B. B. ii. 99.

It was at least an indication that the public ha not forgotten that Browning was a poet. He in Florence, although the hermit life was happ new friends—the gift of England—added to i happiness. Frederick Tennyson, the Laureate brother, and himself a true poet in his degree, " dreamy, shy, speculative man," simple withal an truthful, had married an Italian wife and was settle for a time in Florence. To him Browning becam attached with genuine affection. Mrs Browning wa a student of the writings of Swedenborg, and sh tells much of her new friend in a single Sweden borgian word—" selfhood, the *proprium*, is not i him." Frederick Tennyson, though left in a state c bewilderment by Browning's poetry, found the write of the poetry " a man of infinite learning, jest an bonhommie, and moreover a sterling heart that reverb no hollowness."[1] Another intimate who charme them much was one of the attachés of the Englis embassy, and a poet of unquestionable faculty, ver young, very gentle and refined, delicate and excitable full of sensibility, " full of all sorts of goodness an nobleness," but somewhat dreamy and unpractica " visionary enough," writes Mrs Browning, " to sui me," interested moreover in spiritualism, which suite her well, " never," she unwisely prophesied, " to be great diplomatist." It was hardly, Mr Kenyon, th editor of her letters, observes, a successful horoscop of the destiny of Lord Lytton, the future Ambassado at Paris and Viceroy of India.[2]

[1] Letter of F. Tennyson, in Memoir of Alfred Tennyson, by his so chapter xviii.

[2] Mr Kenyon's note, vol. ii. 142 of Letters of E. B. B.

Early in 1853 Mrs Browning became much terested in the reports which reached her—many these from America—of the "rapping spirits," who the 'fifties were busy in instructing chairs and tables walk in the way they should not go. "You know am rather a visionary," she wrote to Miss Mitford, and inclined to knock round at all the doors of the resent world to try to get out." Her Swedenborgian udies had prepared her to believe that there were mmunities of life in the visible and the invisible orlds which did not permit of the one being wholly tranged from the other. A clever person who loves e marvellous will soon find by the sheer force of gic that marvels are the most natural things in the orld. Should we not credit human testimony? ould we not evict prejudice from our understand-gs? Should we not investigate alleged facts? ould we not keep an open mind? We cannot but el a certain sympathy with a woman of ardent nature ho fails to observe the bounds of intellectual udence. Browning himself with all his audacities as pre-eminently prudent. He did not actively enter to politics; he did not dabble in pseudo-science; he as an artist and a thinker; and he made poems, and nused himself with drawing, modelling in clay, and e study of music. Mrs Browning squandered her thusiasms with less discretion. A good dose of upidity or an indignant energy of common-sense, npatient of the nonsense of the thing, may be the lvation of the average man. It is often the clever ople who would be entirely rational and unprejudiced at best succeed in duping themselves at once by eir reason and their folly. A fine old crusted pre-

judice commonly stands for a thousand acts of judg ment amassed into a convenient working result; single act of an individual understanding, or severa of such acts, will seldom contain an equal sum wisdom. Scientific discovery is not advanced by multitude of curious and ingenious amateurs in learne folly. Whether the claims of spiritualism are warrant able or fallacious, Mrs Browning, gifted as she was wit rare powers of mind, was not qualified to investigat those claims; it was a waste of energy, from whic she could not but suffer serious risks and certain los

Before she had seen anything for herself she was believer—a believer, as she describes it, on testimony The fact of communication with the invisible worl appeared to her more important than anything tha had been communicated. The spirits themselve "seem abundantly foolish, one must admit." Yet was clear to her that mankind was being prepared fo some great development of truth. She would kee her eyes wide open to facts and her soul lifted up i reverential expectation. By-and-by she felt the dum wood of the table panting and shivering with huma emotion. The dogmatism of Faraday in an inadequa theory was simply unscientific, a piece of intellectu tyranny. The American medium Home, she lear from her friends, was "turning the world upside dow in London with this spiritual influx." Two month later, in July 1855, Mrs Browning and her husban were themselves in London, and witnessed Home performances during a séance at Ealing. Miss Gaudrion (afterwards Mrs Merrifield), who was prese on that occasion, and who was convinced that th "manifestations" were a fraud, wrote to Mrs Brownin

r an expression of her opinion. The reply, as might e expected, declared the writer's belief in the genuine naracter of the phenomena; such manifestations, she dmitted, in the undeveloped state of the subject were apt to be low"; but they were, she was assured, "the eginning of access from a spiritual world, of which e shall presently learn more perhaps." A letter olunteered by Browning accompanied that of his ife. He had, he said, to overcome a real repugnance recalling the subject; he could hardly understand ow another opinion was possible than that "the hole display of 'hands,' 'spirit utterances,' etc., was cheat and imposture." It was all "melancholy stuff," hich a grain of worldly wisdom would dispose of in minute. "Mr Browning," the letter goes on, "has, owever, abundant experience that the best and rarest natures may begin by the proper mistrust of the ore ordinary results of reasoning when employed in ch investigations as these, go on to an abnegation the regular tests of truth and rationality in favour these particular experiments, and end in a voluntary ostration of the whole intelligence before what is sumed to transcend all intelligence. Once arrived this point, no trick is too gross—absurdities are ferred to 'low spirits,' falsehoods to 'personating irits'—and the one terribly apparent spirit, the ather of Lies, has it all his own way." These teresting letters were communicated to *The Times* Mr Merrifield (*Literary Supplement*, Nov. 28, 902), and they called forth a short additional letter om Mr R. Barrett Browning, the "Penini" of earlier ys. He mentions that his father had himself on e occasion detected Home in a vulgar fraud; that

Home had called at the house of the Brownings, an
was turned out of it. Mr Browning adds: "Wha
however, I am more desirous of stating is that toward
the end of her life my mother's views on 'spiritua
manifestations' were much modified. This chang
was brought about, in great measure, by the discover
that she had been duped by a friend in whom she ha
blind faith. The pain of the disillusion was great, bu
her eyes were opened and she saw clearly."[1] It mus
be added, that letters written by Mrs Browning si
months before her death give no indication of thi
change of feeling, but she admits that "sublime com
munications" from the other world are "decidedl
absent," and that while no truth can be dangerous
unsettled minds may lose their balance, and may d
wisely to avoid altogether the subject of spiritualism

Browning's hostility arose primarily from his con
viction that the so-called "manifestations" were, as h
says, a cheat and imposture. He had grasped Home'
leg under the table while at work in producing "pheno
mena." He had visited his friend, Seymour Kirkup
had found the old man assisting at the trance of
peasant girl named Mariana; and when Kirkup with
drew for a moment, the entranced Mariana relieve
herself from the fatigue of her posturing, at the sam
time inviting Browning with a wink to be a charitabl
confederate in the joke by which she profited in ad
miration and in pelf. Browning, who would hav
waged immitigable war against the London dog-stealer
and opposed all treaty with such rogues, even at th
cost of an unrecovered Flush, could not but oppos
the new trade of elaborate deception. But his feelin

[1] *Times Lit. Supplement*, Dec. 5, 1902.

vas intensified by the personal repulsiveness of the rofessional medium. The vain, sleek, vulgar, emas-ulated, neurotic type of creature, who became the etted oracle of the dim-lighted room, was loathsome n his eyes. And his respect for his wife's genius nade him feel that there was a certain desecration in ne neighbourhood to her of men whom he regarded s verminous impostors. Yet he recognised her right o think for herself, and she, on the other hand, egarded his scepticism as rather his misfortune than is crime.

It was a considerable time after his wife's death nat Browning's study of the impostor of the spiritual-t circles, "Mr Sludge the Medium," appeared in the *Dramatis Personæ* of 1864; the date of its composi-on is Rome, 1859-60; but the observations which nat study sums up were accumulated during earlier ears, and if Mr Sludge is not a portrait of Home, that minent member of the tribe of Sludge no doubt upplied suggestions for the poet's character-study. rowning evidently wrote the poem with a peculiar est; its intellectual energy never flags; its imagina-ve grip never slackens. If the Bishop, who orders s tomb at St Praxed's, serves to represent the nsuous glory and the moral void of one phase of the alian Renaissance, so, and with equal fidelity, does r Sludge represent a phase of nineteenth century aterialism and moral grossness, which cannot ex-nguish the cravings of the soul but would vulgarise nd degrade them with coarse illusions. Unhappily e later poem differs from the earlier in being uglier its theme and of inordinate length. Browning, mewhat in the manner of Ben Jonson when he

wrote *The Alchemist*, could not be satisfied until he had exhausted the subject to the dregs. The writer's zeal from first to last knows no abatement, but it is not every reader who cares to bend over the dissecting-table, with its sick effluvia, during so prolonged a demonstration.

"Mr Sludge the Medium" is not a mere attack on spiritualism; it is a dramatic scene in the history of a soul; and Browning, with his democratic feeling in things of the mind, held that every soul however mean is worth understanding. If the poem is a satire, it is so only in a way that is inevitable. Browning's desire is to be absolutely just, but sometimes truth itself becomes perforce a satire. He takes an impostor at the moment of extreme disadvantage; the "medium" is caught in the very act of cheating; he will make a clean breast of it; and his confession is made as nearly as possible a vindication. The most contemptible of creatures, in desperate straits, makes excellent play with targe and dagger; the poetry of the piece is to be found in the lithe attitudes, absolutely the best possible under the circumstances, by which he maintains both defence and attack. Half of the long *apologia* is a criticism not of those who feast fools in their folly but of the fools who require a caterer for the feast; it is a study of the methods by which dupes solicit and educate a knave. The other half is Sludge's plea that knave though he be, he is not wholly knave; and Browning, while absolutely rejecting the doctrine of so-called spiritualism, is prepared to admit that in the composition of a Sludge there enters a certain portion of truth, low in degree, perverted in kind, inoperative to the ends of truth, yet a fragment of that without

which life itself were impossible even for the meanest organism in the shape of man.

Cowardly, cunning, insolent, greedy, effeminately sensual, playing upon the vanity of his patrons, playing upon their vulgar sentimentality, playing upon their vulgar pietisms and their vulgar materialism, Sludge after all is less the wronger than the wronged. Who made him what he is? Who, keen and clear-sighted enough in fields which they had not selected as their special parade-ground for self-conceit, trained him on to knavery and self-degradation? Who helped him through his blunders with ingenious excuses—"the manifestations are at first so weak"; or "Sludge is himself disturbed by the strange phenomena"; or "a doubter is in the company, and the spirits have grown confused in their communications"? Who proceeded to exhibit him as a lawful prize and possession, staking their vanity on the success of his imposture? Who awakened in him the artist's joy in rare invention? Who urged him forward from modest to magnificent lies? Who fed and flattered him? What ladies bestowed their soft caresses on Sludge? And now and again in his course of fraud did he not turn a wistful eye towards any reckless tatterdemalion, if only the vagrant lived in freedom and in truth?

> It's too bad, I say,
> Ruining a soul so!

And in the midst of gulls who persistently refuse to be undeceived cheating is so "cruel easy." The difficulty is rather that the cheating, even when acknowledged, should ever be credited for what it is. The medium has confessed! Yes, and to cheat

may be part of the medium nature; none the less he has the medium's gift of acting as a conductor between the visible and the invisible worlds. Has he not told secrets of the lives of his wondering clients which could not have been known by natural means? And Sludge chuckles "could not?"—could not be known by him who in his seeming passivity is alive at every nerve with the instinct of the detective, by him whose trade was

> Throwing thus
> His sense out, like an ant-eater's long tongue,
> Soft, innocent, warm, moist, impassible,
> And when 'twas crusted o'er with creatures—slick,
> Their juice enriched his palate. "Could not Sludge!"

Haunters of the séance of every species are his aiders and abettors—the unbeliever, whom believers overwhelm or bribe to acquiescence, the fair votaries who find prurient suggestions characteristic of the genuine medium, the lover of the lie through the natural love of it, the amateur, incapable of a real conviction, who plays safely with superstition, the literary man who welcomes a new flavour for the narrative or the novel, the philosophic diner-out, who wants the chopping-block of a disputable doctrine on which to try the edge of his faculty. Is it his part Sludge asks indignantly, to be grateful to the patrons who have corrupted and debased him?

> Gratitude to these?
> The gratitude, forsooth, of a prostitute
> To the greenhorn and the bully.

The truculence of Sludge is not without warrant it is indeed no other than the truculence of Rober Browning, "shaking his mane," as Dante Rossett

described him in his outbreaks against the spiritualists, "with occasional foamings at the mouth."[1]

Where then is the little grain of truth which has vitality amid the putrefaction of Sludge's nature? Liar and cheat as he is, he cannot be sure "but there was something in it, tricks and all." The spiritual world, he feels, is as real as the material world; the supernatural interpenetrates the natural at every point; in little things, as in great things, God is present. Sludge is aware of the invisible powers at every nerve:

> I guess what's going on outside the veil,
> Just as the prisoned crane feels pairing-time
> In the islands where his kind are, so must fall
> To capering by himself some shiny night
> As if your back yard were a plot of spice.

He cheats; yes, but he also apprehends a truth which the world is blind to. Or, after all, is this cheating when every lie is quick with a germ of truth? Is not such lying as this a self-desecration, if you will; but still more a strange, sweet self-sacrifice in the service of truth? At the lowest is it not required by the very conditions of our poor mortal life, which remains so sorry a thing, so imperfect, so unendurable until it is brought into fruitful connection with a future existence? This world of ours is a cruel, blundering, unintelligible world; but let it be pervaded by an influx from the next world, how quickly it rights itself! how intelligible it all grows! And is the faculty of imagination, the faculty which discovers the things of the spirit—put to his own uses by the poet and even the historian—

[1] Miss Cobbe's testimony is similar, and Lehmann says that at Home's name Browning would grow pale with passion.

is this a power which cheats its possessor, or cheats those for whose advantage he gives it play?

Browning's design is to exhibit even in this Sludge the rudiments—coarse, perverted, abnormally directed and ineffective for moral good—of that sublime spiritual wisdom, which, turned to its proper ends and aided by the highest intellectual powers, is present—to take a lofty exemplar—in his Pope of *The Ring and the Book*. It is not through spiritualism so-called that Sludge has received his little grain of truth; that has only darkened the glimmer of true light which was in him. Yet liar and cheat and coward, he is saved from a purely phantasmal existence by this fibre of reality which was part of his original structure. The epilogue—Sludge's outbreak against his corrupter and tormentor—stands as evidence of the fact that no purifying, no cleansing, no really illuminating power remains in what is now only a putrescent luminosity within him. His rage is natural and dramatically true; a noble rage would be to his honour. This is a base and poisonous passion with no virtue in it, and the passion, flaring for a moment, sinks idly into as base a fingering of Sludge's disgraceful gains.

The summer and early autumn of 1853 were spent by Browning and his wife, as they had spent the same season four years previously, at the Baths of Lucca. Their house among the hills was shut in by a row of plane-trees in which by day the cicale were shrill; at evening fireflies lit up their garden. The green rushing river—"a flashing scimitar that cuts through the mountain"—the chestnut woods, the sheep-walks, "the villages on the peaks of the

mountains like wild eagles," renewed their former delights.

On the longer excursions Browning slackened his footsteps to keep pace with his wife's donkey; basins of strawberries and cream refreshed the wanderers after their exertion. "Oh those jagged mountains," exclaims Mrs Browning, "rolled together like pre-Adamite beasts, and setting their teeth against the sky. . . . You may as well guess at a lion by a lady's lap-dog as at Nature by what you see in England. All honour to England, lanes and meadow-land, notwithstanding. To the great trees above all." The sculptor Story and his family, whose acquaintance they had made in Florence before Casa Guidi had become their home, were their neighbours at the Baths, and Robert Lytton was for a time their guest. Browning worked at his *Men and Women*, of which his wife was able to report in the autumn that it was in an advanced state. *In a Balcony* was the most important achievement of the summer. The scene of the declaration in *By the Fireside*," Mrs Orr informs us, "was laid in a little adjacent mountain-gorge to which Browning walked or rode."

Only a few weeks were given to Florence. In perfect autumnal weather the occupants of Casa Guidi started for Rome. The delightful journey occupied eight days, and on the way the church of Assisi was seen, and the falls of Terni—"that passion of the waters,"—so Mrs Browning describes it, "which makes the human heart seem so still." They entered Rome in a radiant mood.—"Robert and Penini singing." An apartment had been taken for them by their friends the Storys in the Via Bocca di Leone, and

all was bright, warm, and full of comfort. Next morning a shadow fell upon their happiness—the Storys' little boy was seized with convulsions; in the evening he was dead.[1] A second child—a girl—was taken ill in the Brownings' house, and could not be moved from where she lay in a room below their apartment. Mrs Browning was in a panic for her own boy, though his apple-red cheeks spoke of health. Rome, for a time, was darkened with grief and anxiety; nor did the city itself impress her as she had expected: "It's a palimpsest Rome," she writes, "a watering-place written over the antique." The chief gains of these Roman months were those of friendship and pleasant acquaintances added to those already given by Italy. In rooms under those occupied by the Brownings was Page the American artist, who painted in colours then regarded as "Venetian," now almost darkened out of existence, as a gift for Mrs Browning, the portrait of Robert Browning exhibited in the Royal Academy of 1856. Browning himself wrote to Story with enthusiasm of Page's work. "I am much disappointed in it," wrote Dante Rossetti to Allingham, "and shall advise its non-exhibition." A second portrait painted at this time—that by Fisher—is familiar to us through a reproduction in the second volume of *The Letters of Mrs Browning*. A rash act of the morning of the day on which he entered Rome had deplorably altered Browning's appearance. In what his wife calls a fit of suicidal impatience, he perpetrated the high crime and misdemeanour, and appeared before her wholly

[1] See "Story and his Friends," by Henry James, 1903, vol. i. pp. 284, 285.

unworthy of portraiture with clean-shaven cheeks and chin. "I cried when I saw him," she tells his sister, "I was so horror-struck." To mark the sin, his beard, when once again he recovered his good looks, was gray, but Mrs Browning cherished the opinion that the argentine touch, as she terms it, gave "a character of elevation and thought to his whole physiognomy." To complete this history, it may be added that in 1859 the moustache of his later portraits was first doubtfully permitted and was presently approved with decision as picturesque.[1]

Under all disadvantages of appearance Browning made his way triumphantly in the English and American society of Rome. The studios were open to him. In Gibson's he saw the tinted Venus—'rather a grisette than a goddess," pronounced Mrs Browning. Harriet Hosmer, the young American sculptress, working with true independence, high aims and right woman's manliness, was both admired and loved. Thackeray, with his daughters, called at the apartment in the Bocca di Leone, bringing small-talk in "handfuls of glittering dust swept out of salons." Lockhart, snow-white in aspect, snow-cold in manner, gave Browning emphatic commendation, though of a negative kind—"He isn't at all," declared Lockhart, "like a damned literary man." But of many interesting acquaintances perhaps the most highly valued were Fanny Kemble and her sister Adelaide Sartoris—Fanny Kemble magnificent, "with her black hair and radiant smile," her sympathetic voice, "her eyes and eyelids full of utterance"—a very noble creature indeed; Mrs Sartoris, genial and generous, more tolerant

[1] Letters of E. B. B., ii. 345.

than Fanny of Mrs Browning's wayward enthusiasms, eloquent in talk and passionate in song. "The Kembles," writes Mrs Browning, "were our gain in Rome."

Towards the end of May 1854 farewells were said, and the Brownings returned from Rome to Florence by vettura. They had hoped to visit England, or if this should prove impracticable, to take shelter among the mountains from the summer heat. But needful coin on which they had reckoned did not arrive; and they resolved in prudence to sit still at Florence and eat their bread and macaroni as poor sensible folk should do. And Florence looked more beautiful than ever after Rome; the nightingales sang around the olive-trees and vineyards, not only by starlight and fire-fly-light but in the daytime. "I love the very stones of Florence," exclaims Mrs Browning. Her friend Miss Mitford, now in England, and sadly failing in health, hinted at a loan of money; but the answer was a prompt, "Oh no! My husband has a family likeness to Lucifer in being proud." There followed a tranquil and a happy time, and both *Men and Women* and *Aurora Leigh* maintained in the writers a deep inward excitement of the kind that leaves an enduring result. A little joint publication; *Two Poems by E. B. B. and R. B.*, containing *A Plea for the Ragged Schools of London* and *The Twins*, was sold at Miss Arabella Barrett's Ragged School bazaar in 1854. It is now a waif of literature which collectors prize. There is special significance in the *Date* and *Dabitur*, the twins of Browning's poem, when we bear in mind the occasion with which it was originally connected.

In the early weeks of 1855 Mrs Browning was seriously ill; through feverish nights of coughing, she had in her husband a devoted nurse. His sleepless hours were troubled not only by anxiety on her account but by a passionate interest in the heroisms and miseries of his fellow countrymen during the Crimean winter: "when he is mild he wishes the ministry to be torn to pieces in the streets, limb from limb." Gradually his wife regained health, but she had not long recovered when tidings of the death of Miss Mitford came to sadden her. Not until April did she feel once more a leap into life. Browning was now actively at work in anticipation of printing his new volumes during the approaching visit to England. "He is four hours a day," his wife tells a correspondent, "engaged in dictating to a friend of ours who transcribes for him." And a little later she reports that they will take to England between them some sixteen thousand lines of verse, "eight on one side, eight on the other," her husband's total being already completed, her own still short of the sum by a thousand lines. Allowance, as she pleads, had to be made for time spent in seeing that "Penini's little trousers are creditably frilled and tucked." On the whole, notwithstanding illness and wrath directed against English ministerial blunders, this year of life in Florence had been rich in happiness—a "still dream-life, where if one is over-busy ever, the old tapestries on the walls and the pre-Giotto pictures . . . surround us, ready to quiet us again."[1] London lodgings did not look inviting from the distance of Italy; but the summons north was a summons to work, and could not be set aside.

[1] E. B. B. to Ruskin, *Letters*, ii. 199.

The midsummer of 1855 found Browning and hi wife in 13 Dorset Street, London, and Browning' sister was with them. The faithful Wilson, Mr Browning's maid, had married a Florentine, Ferdinand Romagnoli, and the husband also was now in thei service. The weeks until mid-October were occupie with social pleasures and close proof-reading of th sheets of *Men and Women*.[1] Browning took his youn friend the artist Leighton to visit Ruskin, and wa graciously received. Carlyle was, as formerly, "i great force, particularly in the damnatory clauses But the weather was drooping, the skies misty, th air oppressive, and Mrs Browning, apart from thes had special causes of depression. Her married siste Henrietta was away in Taunton, and the cost of trav prevented the sisters from meeting. Arabella Barre —"my one light in London" is Mrs Browning word—was too soon obliged to depart to Eastbourn And the Barrett household was disturbed by the ur dutifulness of a son who had been guilty of the ur pardonable crime of marriage, and in consequence wa now exiled from Wimpole Street. In body and sou Mrs Browning felt strong yearnings for the calm o Casa Guidi.

The year 1855 was a fortunate year for Englis poetry. *Men and Women* was published in the autumn; the beautiful epilogue, addressed to E. B. B. "There they are, my fifty men and women," was written in Dorset Street. Tennyson's *Maud* had preceded Browning's volumes by some months. It bewildered the critics, but his brother poet did justice to

[1] Which, however, did not prevent certain errors noted in a letter o Browning to Dante Rossetti.

Tennyson's passionate sequence of dramatic lyrics. And though London in mid-autumn had emptied itself Tennyson happened for a few days to be in town. Two evenings he gave to the Brownings, "dined with us," writes Mrs Browning, "smoked with us, opened his heart to us (and the second bottle of port), and ended by reading *Maud* through from end to end, and going away at half-past two in the morning." His delightful frankness and simplicity charmed his hostess. "Think of his stopping in *Maud*," she goes on, "every now and then—'There's a wonderful touch! That's very tender! How beautiful that is!' Yes and it *was* wonderful, tender, beautiful, and he read exquisitely in a voice like an organ, rather music than speech."

One of the few persons who were invited to meet Tennyson on this occasion, Mr W. M. Rossetti, is still living, and his record of that memorable evening ought not to be omitted. "The audience was a small one, the privilege accorded to each individual all the higher: Mr and Mrs Browning, Miss Browning, my brother, and myself, and I think there was one more—either Madox Brown or else [Holman] Hunt or Woolner. . . Tennyson, seated on a sofa in a characteristic attitude, and holding the volume near his eyes. . . . read *Maud* right through. My brother made two pen-and-ink sketches of him, and gave one of them to Browning. So far as I remember, the Poet-Laureate neither saw what Dante was doing, nor knew of it afterwards. His deep grand voice, with slightly chaunting intonation, was a noble vehicle for the perusal of mighty verse. On it rolled, sonorous and emotional. Dante Rossetti, according to Mr Hall

Caine, spoke of the incident in these terms: 'I once heard Tennyson read *Maud*; and, whilst the fiery passages were delivered with a voice and vehemence which he alone of living men can compass, the softer passages and the songs made the tears course down his cheeks.' . . . After Tennyson and *Maud* came Browning and *Fra Lippo Lippi*—read with as much sprightly variation as there was in Tennyson of sustained continuity. Truly a night of the gods, not to be remembered without pride and pang."[1] A quotation from a letter of Dante Rossetti to Allingham gives praise to Mrs Browning of a kind which resembles Lockhart's commendation of her husband: "What a delightful unliterary person Mrs Browning is to meet! During two evenings when Tennyson was at their house in London, Mrs Browning left Tennyson with her husband and William and me (who were the fortunate remnant of the male party) to discuss the universe, and gave all her attention to some certainly not very exciting ladies in the next room."[2] Without detracting from Mrs Browning's "unliterary" merits, one may conjecture that the ladies who proved unexciting to Rossetti were Arabella Barrett and Sarianna Browning.

[1] Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His "Family Letters," i. 190, 191.

[2] Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham, 162. See Mrs Browning's letter to Mrs Tennyson in Memoir of Tennyson by his son, 1 vol. edition, p. 329.

Chapter IX

Men and Women

ROSSETTI expresses his first enthusiasm about *Men and Women* in a word when he calls the poems "my Elixir of Life." To Ruskin these, with other pieces which he now read for the first time, were, as he declared in a rebellious mood, a mass of conundrums. "He compelled me," Rossetti adds, "to sit down before him and lay siege for one whole night; the result of which was that he sent me next morning a bulky letter to be forwarded to Browning, in which I trust he told him he was the greatest man since Shakespeare." The poems of the two new volumes were the gradual growth of a considerable number of years; since 1845 their author had published no group of short poems, and now, at the age of forty-three, he had attained the fulness of intellectual and imaginative power, varied experience of life, and the artistic culture of Italy. The *Dramatis Personæ* of 1864 exhibits no decline from the high level reached in the volumes of 1855; but is there any later volume of miscellaneous poetry by Browning which, taken as a whole, approaches in excellence the collections of 1855 and 1864?

There is no need now to "lay siege" to the poems of *Men and Women*; they have expounded themselves,

if ever they needed exposition; and the truth is that they are by no means nut-shells into which mottoes meant for the construing of the intellect have been inserted, but fruits rich in colour and perfume, a feast for the imagination, the passions, the spirit in sense, and also for the faculty of thought which lives in the heart of these. If a criticism or a doctrine of life lies in them—and that it should do so means that the poet's total mind has been taken up into his art—Browning conveys his doctrine not as such but as an enthusiasm of living; his generalized truth saturates a medium of passion and of beauty. In the Prologue to *Fifine at the Fair* he compares the joy of poetry to a swimmer's joy in the sea: the vigour that such disport in sun and sea communicates is the vigour of joyous play; afterwards, if we please, we can ascertain the constituents of sea-water by a chemical analysis; but the analysis will not convey to us the sensations of the sunshine and the dancing brine. One of the blank-verse pieces of *Men and Women* rebukes a youthful poet of the transcendental school whose ambition is to set forth "stark-naked thought" in poetry. Why take the harp to his breast "only to speak dry words across the strings"? Better hollo abstract ideas through the six-foot Alpine horn of prose. Boys may desire the interpretation into bare ideas of those thronging objects which obsess their senses and their feelings; men need art for the delight of it, and the strength which comes through delight. Better than the meaning of a rose is the rose itself with its spirit enveloped in colour and perfume. And so the poet for men will resemble that old mage John of Halberstadt:

He with a 'look you!' vents a brace of rhymes,
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
Over us, under, round us every side,
. . . . . .
Buries us with a glory, young once more,
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.

Browning in *Men and Women* is in truth a John of Halberstadt; he enriches life with colour, warmth, music, romance, not dissociated from thought and intellectual energy, rather possessing and being possessed by these. Not a single poem is "stark-naked thought"; not a single poem is addressed solely to the intellect; even *Bishop Blougram* is rather a representation of character than a train of argument or chain of ideas.

In few of these poems does Browning speak in his own person; the verses addressed to his wife, which present her with "his fifty men and women" and tell of mysteries of love that can never be told, the lines, *Memorabilia*, addressed to one who had seen Shelley, and *Old Pictures in Florence*, are perhaps the only exceptions to the dramatic character of the contents of the two volumes. Yet through them all Browning's mind is clearly discernible; and even his central convictions, his working creed of life, can with no sense of uncertainty be gathered from them. To attribute to the writer the opinions and the feelings of his *dramatis personæ* would of course be the crudest of mistakes. But when an idea persists through many poems written at various times and seasons, when it appears and reappears under various clothings of circumstance, when it is employed as if it had a crucial value, when it becomes a test or touchstone of character, we cannot doubt that it is an intimate

possession of the writer's mind. Such an idea is not a mere playmate but rather a confidant. When again, after a tangle of casuistic reasoning or an embroilment of contending feelings, some idea suddenly flashes forth, and like a sword sunders truth from falsehood and darkness from light, we may be assured that it has more than a dramatic value. And, once more, if again and again the same idea shows its power over the feelings and inspires elevated lyrical utterance or if in pieces of casuistical brain-work it enters as a passionate element and domineers by its own authority if it originates not debate but song or that from which song is made, we know that the writer's heart has embraced it as a truth of the emotions.

Because Browning had his own well-defined view of truth, he could confidently lend his mind away to his fifty or his hundred men and women. They served to give his ideas a concrete body. By sympathy and by intelligence he widened the basis of his own existence. If the poet loses himself to find himself again through sympathy with external nature, how much more and in how many enriching ways through sympathy with humanity! Thus new combinations of thought and feeling are effected. Thus a kind of experiment is made with our own ideas by watching how they behave when brought into connection with these new combinations. Truth is relative, and the best truth of our own is worth testing under various conditions and circumstances. The truth or falsehood which is not our own has a right to say the best for itself that can be said. Let truth and falsehood grapple. Let us hear the counter-truth or the rival falsehood which is the complement or the criticism of our own, and hear it

ated with the utmost skill. A Luther would surely
: the wiser for an evening spent in company with a
ougram ; and Blougram has things to tell us which
uther never knew. But precisely because truth is
lative we must finally adhere to our own percep-
ons ; they constitute the light for us ; and the justice
e would do to others we must also render to our-
lves. A wide survey may be made from a fixed
ntre. "Universal sympathies," Miss Barrett wrote
one of the letters to her future husband, "cannot
ake a man inconsistent, but on the contrary sublimely
nsistent. A church tower may stand between the
ountains and the sea, looking to either, and stand
st: but the willow tree at the gable-end blown now
ward the north and now toward the south, while its
tural leaning is due east or west, is different al-
gether . . . *as* different as a willow tree from a
urch tower." [1]

The fifty poems of *Men and Women*, with a few
ceptions, fall into three principal groups—those
nich interpret various careers or moods or moments
love ; those which deal with the fine arts—painting,
oetry, music—and with these we may class, as
ndred in spirit, that poem which has for its subject
e passionate pursuit of knowledge, *A Grammarian's*
uneral ; and thirdly, those which are connected with
ligious thought and feeling, or present scenes from
e history of religions. Two poems may be called
escriptive ; both are Italian ; both are founded upon
rivalry of contrasts, but one, *Up at a Villa—Down*
the City, is made up of humorous observations of
alian city and country life, expressing the mundane

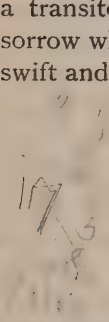
[1] Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., i. 388.

tastes and prudent economies of an Italian person of quality; the other, "*De Gustibus*—," which contrasts the happy quietudes of English landscape with the passionate landscape of the South, has romance at the heart of its realism and an ardour of sentiment underlying its pictorial vividness. *The Patriot* is again Italian, suggested perhaps by the swift revolutions and restorations which Browning had witnessed in Florence; and again it uses with striking effect the principle of contrast; the patriot who a year ago had his intoxicating triumph is now on his way to the scaffold. His year's toil for the good of his people has turned into a year's misdeeds, his life is a failure; but Browning characteristically wrings a victory out of defeat; the crowd at the shambles' gate may hoot; it is better so, for now the martyr can throw himself upon God, the Paymaster of all his labourers at the close of day. The most remarkable of these poems, which refuse to take their places in a group, is that forlorn romance of weary and depressed heroism, *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.* It is in the main a fantaisie of description; but involved with the descriptive study is a romantic motive. The external suggestions for the poem were no more than the words from *King Lear* which form the title, a tower seen in the Carrara mountains, a painting seen in Paris, and the figure of a horse in the tapestry of the drawing-room of Casa Guidi.[1] In his own mind Browning may have put the question: Of all the feats of knight-errantry which is the hardest? Not to combat with dragons, or robbers, or salvage men; not to bear down rival

[1] Mrs Orr's Handbook to Browning's Works, 266, note. For the horse, see stanzas xiii. xiv. of the poem.

ampions in a rapture of battle. Not these but to
ng to a purpose amid all that depresses the senses
a time when the heart within us is also failing; to
vance where there is nothing to arouse energy by
position, and everything without and within to sap
e very life of the soul. Childe Roland is himself
peless and almost heartless; the plain to which the
ering cripple had pointed and over which he rides
created in the utter indigence of nature—a very
ghtmare of poverty and mean repulsiveness. And
t he endures the test, and halts only when he faces
e Dark Tower and blows the blast upon his horn.
owning was wise to carry his romance no further;
e one moment of action is enough; it is the break-
g of the spell, the waking from the nightmare, and
that point the long-enduring quester may be left.
e are defrauded of nothing by the abrupt conclusion.
In the poems which treat of the love of man and
oman Browning regards the union of soul with soul
the capital achievement of life, and also as affording
ie of its chief tests. When we have formed these
to a group we perceive that the group falls in the
ain into two divisions—poems which tell of attain-
ent, and poems which tell of failure or defeat.
ertain persons whose centre is a little hard kernel
egoism may be wholly disqualified for the test
eated by a generous passion. Browning does not
labour with heavy invective the *Pretty Woman* of
s poem, who is born without a heart; she is a
wer-like creature and of her kind is perfect; only
e flower is to be gazed at, not gathered; or, if it
ust be gathered, then at last to be thrown away.
ie chief distinction between the love of man and

the love of woman, implied in various poems, is this—the man at his most blissful moment cries "What treasures I have obtained!" the woman cries "What treasures have I to surrender and bestow?" Hence the singleness and finality in the election of passion made by a woman as compared with a man's acquisitiveness of delight. The unequal exchange of a transitory for an enduring surrender of self is the sorrow which pulsates through the lines of *In a Year*, as swift and broken with pauses as the beating of a heart



Dear, the pang is brief,
Do thy part,
Have thy pleasure! How perplexed
Grows belief!
Well, this cold clay clod
Was man's heart:
Crumble it and what comes next?
Is it God?

And with no chilling of love on the man's part, this is the point of central pain, in that poem of exquisite and pathetic distrust at the heart of trust and admiration, *Any Wife to any Husband;* noble and faithful as the husband has been, still he is only a man. But elsewhere Browning does justice to the pure chivalry of a man's devotion. Caponsacchi's joy is the joy of a saviour who himself is saved; the great event of his life by which he is lifted above self is single and ultimate; his soul is delivered from careless egoism once and for ever; the grace of love is here what the theologians called invincible grace, and invincible grace, we know, results in final perseverance. Even here in *Men and Women* two contrasted poems assure us that, while the passion of a man may be no more

nan *Love in a Life*, it may also be an unweariable *ife in a Love.*

Of the poems of attainment one—*Respectability*—has ne spirit of youth and gaiety in it. Here love makes s gallant bid for freedom, fires up for lawlessness, if eed be, and at least sets convention at defiance:

> The world's good word!—the Institute!
> Guizot receives Montalembert!
> Eh? Down the court three lampions flare:
> Set forward your best foot!

But, after all, this love may be no more than an dventure of the boulevard and the attic in the manner f Béranger's gay Bohemianism. The distance is wide etween such élan of youthful passion and the fidelity hich is inevitable, and on which age has set its seal, n that poem of perfect attainment, *By the Fireside.* his is the love which completes the individual life nd at the same time incorporates it with the life f humanity, which unites as one the past and the resent, and which, owing no allegiance of a servile ind to time, becomes a pledge for futurity. Browning's personal experience is here taken up nto his imagination and transfigured, but its substance emains what it had been in literal fact.

The poems of failure are more numerous, and they ange through various degrees and kinds of failure. t is not death which can bring the sense of failure to ove. In *Evelyn Hope* all the passion has been on the nan's side; all possibilities of love in the virginal eart of the dead girl, all her warmth and sweetness, ad been folded in the bud. But death, in the mood f infinite tenderness and unfulfilled aspiration which he poem expresses, seems no bar to some far-off

attainment, of which the speaker's passion, breakin through time, is the assurance, an attainment th nature of which he cannot divine but which wi surely explain the meaning of things that are no obscure. Perhaps the saddest and the most hopeles kind of failure is that in which, to borrow an imag from the old allegory, the arrow of love all but flies t the mark and yet just misses it. This is the subjec of a poem equally admirable in its descriptive and it emotional passages, *Two in the Campagna.* The lin "One near one is too far," might serve as its motto Satisfaction is all but reached and never can b reached. Two hearts touch and never can unite One drop of the salt estranging sea is as unplumbe as the whole ocean. And the only possible end is

> Infinite passion, and the pain
> Of finite hearts that yearn.[1]

Compared with such a failure as this an offer of lov rejected, rejected with decision but not ungenerously may be accounted a success. There is something tonic to a brave heart in the putting forth of will, ever though it encounter an obstacle which cannot be removed. Such is the mood which is presented in *One Way of Love;* the foiled lover has at least made his supreme effort; it has been fruitless, but he thinks with satisfaction that he has played boldly for the prize, and never can he say that it was not worth risking all on the bare chance of success:

> She will not give me heaven? 'Tis well!
> Lose who may—I still can say
> Those who win heaven, blest are they!

[1] This poem is sometimes expounded as a sigh for the infinite, which no human love can satisfy. But the simpler conception of it as expressing a love almost but not altogether complete seems the truer.

So, too, in *The Last Ride together*, the lover is defeated but he is not cast down, and he remains magnanimous throughout the grief of defeat. (Who this our life—he reflects—statesman or soldier, sculptor or poet, attains his complete ideal?) He has been granted the grace of one hour by his mistress' ode, and he will carry the grateful recollection of his with him into the future as his inalienable and is best possession. With these generous rejections and magnanimous acceptances of failure stands in contrast *Serenade at the Villa*, where the lover's devotion is let only by obdurate insensibility or, worse, by an irritated sense of the persecution and plague of such ve, and where all things seem to conspire to leave s pain mere pain, bitter and unredeemed.

In these examples, though love has been frustrated its aim, the cause of failure did not lie in any firmity of the lover's heart or will. But what if the ill itself be supine, what if it dallies and delays, onsults the convenience of occasions, observes the dications of a shallow prudence, slackens its pace wards the goal, and meanwhile the passion languishes nd grows pale from day to day, until the day of love as waned, and the passion dies in a twilight hour rough mere inanition? Such a failure as this seems to rowning to mean the perishing of a soul, or of more souls an one. He takes in *The Statue and the Bust* a case here the fulfilment of passion would have been a crime. he lady is a bride of the Riccardi; to win her, now a edded wife, would be to violate the law of God and man. evertheless it is her face which has "filled the empty eath of a man" with a blade for a knight's adventure—

The Duke grew straightway brave and wise.

And then follow delays of convenience, excuses postponements, and the Duke's flood of passion dwindles to a thread, and is lost in the sandy flats of life :

> So weeks grew months, years ; gleam by gleam
> The glory dropped from their youth and love,
> And both perceived they had dreamed a dream.

Their end was a crime, but Browning's contention is that a crime may serve for a test as well as a virtue ; in that test the Duke and the lady had alike failed through mere languor of soul :

> And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
> Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
> Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.

Had Tennyson treated the same subject he would probably have glorified their action as a victorious obedience to the law of self-reverence and self-control.

The reunion and the severance of lovers are presented in three poems. Winter, chill without but warm within, with its pastimes of passion, the energies of joy breaking forth in play, is contrasted in *A Lovers' Quarrel* with springtime, all gladness without and a strange void and shiver at the heart of things, because alienation has taken the place of camaraderie between the lover and his mistress. The mass and intensity of colour in the stanza which dashes in a sketch of the Pampas, with its leagues of sunflowers, and a wild horse, "black neck and eyeballs keen" appearing through them, almost afflict the reader's sense of sight. There is a fine irony in the title of the other poem of contention, *A Woman's Last Word:* In a quarrel

roman will have the last word, and here it is—the eed of quietude for a little while that she may re- over from the bewildering stroke of pain, and then ntire oblivion of the wrong with unmeasured self- urrender. The poem of union, *Love among the Ruins*, constructed in a triple contrast; the endless pastures rolonged to the edge of sunset, with their infinity of alm, are contrasted with the vast and magnificent nimation of the city which once occupied the plain nd the mountain slopes. The lover keeps at arm's- ength from his heart and brain what yet fills them all ne while; here in this placid pasture-land is one vivid oint of intensest life; here where once were the randeur and tumult of the enormous city is that hich in a moment can abolish for the lover all its lories and its shames. His eager anticipation of neeting his beloved, face to face and heart to heart, s not sung, after the manner of Burns, as a jet of un- ningled joy; he delays his rapture to make its arrival nore entirely rapturous; he uses his imagination to heck and to enhance his passion; and the poem, nough not a simple cry of the heart, is entirely true s a rendering of emotion which has taken imagina- ion into its service. In like manner *By the Fireside*, *Serenade at the Villa*, and *Two in the Campagna*, nclude certain studies of nature and its moods, some- mes with a curiously minute observation of details; nd these serve as the overture to some intense noment of joy or pain, or form the orchestration hich sustains or reinforces a human voice.

Of the pieces relating to art those connected with ne art of poetry are the least valuable. *Trans- ndentalism* sets forth the old doctrine that poetry

must be sensuous and passionate, leaving it to philosophy to deal with the naked abstractions of the intellect. *How it strikes a Contemporary* shows by a humorous example how a poet's character and private life may be misconceived and misrepresented by those among whom he moves. *Popularity* maintains that the poet who is in the highest sense original, an inventor of new things, may be wholly disregarded for long, while his followers and imitators secure both the porridge and the praise; one day God's hand which holds him, will open and let out all the beauty. The thought is an obvious one enough, but the image of the fisher and the murex, in which the thought is embodied, affords opportunity for stanzas glowing with colour. Two poems, and each of them a remarkable poem, are interpretations of music. One, *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha*, is a singularly successful *tour de force*, if it is no more. Poetry inspired by music is almost invariably the rendering of a sentiment or a mood which the music is supposed to express; but here, in dealing with the fugue of his imaginary German composer, Browning finds his inspiration not in the sentiment but in the structure of the composition; he competes, as it were, in language with the art or science of the contrapuntist and evolves an idea of his own from its complexity and elaboration. The poem of Italian music, *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, wholly subordinates the science to the sentiment of the piece. It is steeped in the melancholy of pleasure; Venice of the eighteenth century lives before us with its mundane joys, its transitory passions, its voluptuous hours; and in the midst of its warmth and colour a chill creeps upon

ur senses and we shiver. Browning's artistic self-estraint is admirable; he has his own truth to utter oud if he should please; but here he will not play ne prophet; the life of eighteenth-century Venice is ust and ashes; the poet will say not a word more nan the musician has said in his toccata; the ruth-ssness of time and death make him a little remorse-il; it is enough, and too much, that through this nusic of the hours of love and pleasure we should ear, as it were, the fall of the clay upon a coffin-lid.

Shelley was more impressed by the sculpture than ne paintings of Italy. There are few evidences of ne influence of the most ideal of the arts that appeal o the mind through the eye in Browning's poetry; nd his sympathies would be more apt to respond to uch work as Michael Angelo's, which sends the pectator beyond itself, than to the classical work hich has the absoluteness and the calm of attained erfection.[1] The sensuous and the spiritual qualities f colour were vividly felt by him; a yellowing old narble seemed perhaps to impose itself with a cold uthority upon the imagination. But the suggestion f two portrait busts of the period of classical de-adence, one in marble representing a boy, and the ther the powerful head of a man in granite, gave se to *Protus*, one of the few flawless poems of rowning. His mastery over the rhymed couplet is owhere seen to greater advantage, unless it be in few passages of *Sordello*. The poem is, however, nore a page from history than a study in the fine arts; nd Browning's imagination has made it a page which ves in our memory through a pathos veiled under

[1] Browning's delight a few years later in modelling in clay was great.

strong objective touches, never protruding itself sentimentally in quest of tenderness or pity.

"I spent some most delightful time," Rossetti wrote to Allingham shortly after the publication of *Men and Women*, "with Browning at Paris, both in the evening and at the Louvre, where (and throughout conversation) I found his knowledge of early Italian art beyond that of any one I ever met—*encyclopædically* beyond that of Ruskin himself." The poem *Old Pictures at Florence*, which Rossetti calls "a jolly thing," and which is that and much more, is full of Browning's learned enthusiasm for the early Italian painters, and it gives a reason for the strong attraction which their adventures after new beauty and passion had for him as compared with the faultless achievements of classical sculpture. Greek art, according to Browning, by presenting unattainable ideals of material and mundane perfection, taught men to submit. Early Christian art even by faultily presenting spiritual ideals, not to be attained on earth but to be pursued through an immortal life, taught men to aspire. The aim of these painters was not to exhibit strength or grace, joy or grief, rage or love in their complete earthly attainment but rather to

> Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
> New fears aggrandize the rags and tatters:
> To bring the invisible full into play!
> Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters?

The prophecy with which the poem concludes, of a great revival of Italian art consequent on the advent of political and intellectual liberty, has not obtained fulfilment in the course of the half century that has elapsed since it was uttered. Browning's doctrine that

piration towards what is higher is more to be valued
art than the attainment of what is lower is a lead-
g motive in the admirable dramatic monologue
ced in the lips of Andrea del Sarto, the faultless
inter. His craftsmanship is unerring; whatever he
agines he can achieve; nothing in line or in colour is
ier than it ought to be; and yet precisely because he
s succeeded, his failure is profound and irretrievable:

> Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
> Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey
> Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!

He could set right the arm which is wrongly put in
fael's work that fronts him; but "all the play, the
ight and the stretch" of Rafael are lacking in his
n faultless lines. He looks back regretfully to his
gly days at Fontainebleau with the royal Francis,
en what seemed a veritable fire was in his heart.
d he tries to find an excuse for his failure as artist
l as man in the coldness of his beautiful Lucrezia—
he who has failed in the higher art has also failed
the higher love—Lucrezia, who values his work
y by the coins it brings in, and who needs those
ns just now for one whose whistle invites her away.
might be so much better otherwise! Yet other-
e he cannot choose that it should be; his art must
ain what it is—not golden but silver-grey; and
Lucrezia may attend to the Cousin's whistle if only
retains the charm, not to be evaded, of her beauty.[1]

[1] Mrs Andrew Crosse, in her article, "John Kenyon and his Friends" (*Temple Bar Magazine*, April 1900), writes: "When the Brownings were in Florence, Kenyon had begged them to procure for him a copy of the portrait in the Pitti of Andrea del Sarto and his wife. Mr Browning was unable to get the copy made with any promise of satisfaction, and wrote the exquisite poem of Andrea del Sarto—and sent it to Kenyon!"

Browning does not mean that art in its passionat pursuit of the highest ends should be indifferent t the means, or that things spiritual do not require a adequate a sensuous embodiment as they are capabl of receiving from the painter's brush or the poet's pe Were art a mere symbol or suggestion, two bits c sticks nailed crosswise might claim to be art a admirable as any. What is the eye for, if not to se with vivid exactness? what is the hand for, if not t fashion things as nature made them? It is throug body that we reach after the soul; and the passio for truth and reality is a passion for the invisibl which is expressed in and through these. Such is th pleading of Fra Lippo Lippi, the tonsured painte caught out of bounds, in that poem in which th dramatic monologue of Browning attains its perfectio of life and energy. Fra Lippo is intoxicated by th mere forms and colours of things, and he is assure that these mean intensely and mean well:

> The beauty and the wonder and the power,
> The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
> Changes, surprises—and God made it all!

These are the gospel to preach which he girds lo and lights the lamp, though he may perforce indul a patron in shallower pieties of the conventional ord and though it is not all gospel with him, for now a again, when the moon shines and girls go skippi and singing down Florence streets—"Zooks, sir, fle and blood, that's all I'm made of!" Fra Lippo wi his outbreaks of frank sensuality is far nearer Browning's kingdom of heaven than is the faultl painter; he presses with ardour towards his pro goal in art; he has full faith in the ideal, but with hi

t is to be sought only through the real; or rather it eed not be sought at all, for one who captures any ragment of reality captures also undesignedly and nevitably its divine significance.[1]

The same doctrine which is applied to art in *Old Pictures in Florence*, that high aims, though unattained, re of more worth than a lower achievement, is applied, nd with a fine lyrical enthusiasm, to the pursuit of nowledge in *A Grammarian's Funeral*. The time is shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe"; he place—

> a tall mountain, citied to the top,
> Crowded with culture!—

imagined to suit the idea of the poem. The dead cholar, borne to the summit for burial on the shoulders f his disciples, had been possessed by the aspiration f Paracelsus—to know; and, unlike Paracelsus, he ad never sought on earth both to know and to enjoy. He has been the saint and the martyr of Renaissance hilology. For the genius of such a writer as the uthor of *Hudibras*, with his positive intellect and ense common sense, there could hardly have been ound a fitter object for mockery than this remorseless nd indefatigable pedant. Browning, through the nging voices of the dead master's disciples, exalts im to an eminence of honour and splendid fame. To scholar Greek particles may serve as the fittest test

[1] The writer of this volume many years ago pointed out to Browning s transposition of the chronological places of Fra Lippo Lippi and asaccio ("Hulking Tom") in the history of Italian art. Browning gorously maintained that he was in the right; but recent students do ot support his contention. At the same time an error in *Transcen-ntalism*, where Browning spoke of "Swedish Boehme," was indicated. e acknowledged the error and altered the text to "German Boehme."

of virtue; this glorious pedant has postponed life and the enjoyments of life to future cycles of existence; here on earth he expends a desperate passion—upon what? Upon the dryasdust intricacies of grammar; and it is not as though he had already attained; he only desperately follows after:

> That low man seeks a little thing to do,
> Sees it and does it:
> This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
> Dies ere he knows it.

But again the grammarian, like the painter, does not strive after a vague, transcendental ideal; he is not as one that beateth the air; his quest for knowledge is definite and positive enough; he throws all care for infinite things, except the infinite of philological accuracy, upon God; and the viaticum of his last moments is one more point of grammar.

Two of the poems of *Men and Women* are pages tragic-grotesque and pathetic-grotesque from the history of religion. In *The Heretic's Tragedy* John, Master of the Temple, burns alive in Paris square for his sins against the faith and Holy Church; the glow of the blazing larch and pine almost reaches the reader of the stanzas; the great petals of this red rose of flame bend towards him; the gust of sulphur offends his nostrils. And the rage of piety is hotter than the fire; it is a mingled passion, compounded of delight in the fierce spectacle, a thrilling ecstacy at the sight of a fellow-creature tortured, the self-complacency of conscious orthodoxy, and the horrible zeal of the Lord's house. Yet though the event is sung by one of the rejoicing orthodox, somehow we are made to feel that when John the apostate, bound in the flames

nd gagged, prays to Jesus Christ to save him, that rayer may have been answered. This passage from he story of the age of faith was not selected with a iew to please the mediæval revivalists of the nine- eenth century, but in truth its chief value is not heological or historical but artistic. *Holy Cross Day*, second fragment from history, does not fall from the ublime to the ridiculous but rises from the ridiculous o the sublime. The picture of the close-packed Jews umbling or sidling churchwards to hear the Christian ermon (for He saith "Compel them to come in") and o partake of heavenly grace has in it something of embrandt united with something of Callot. Such a rew of devout impostors is at once comic and piteous. ut while they are cared for in the merciful bowels of ne Church, and groan out the expected compunction, neir ancient piety is not extinct; their hearts burn i them with the memory of Jacob's House and of erusalem. Christ at least was of their kindred, and they wronged Him in past time, they will not wrong im now by naming these who outrage and insult em after His name.

The historical distortions of the religion of Christ o not, however, disturb the faith of Browning in the hristian revelation of Divine love. In *Cleon* he ex- bits the failure of Paganism, even in its forms of ghest culture, to solve the riddle of life and to answer e requirements of the human spirit. All that regal ower liberally and wisely used can confer belongs to otus in his Tyranny; all that genius, and learning d art can confer is the possession of Cleon; and a ofound discouragement has settled down upon the ul of each. The race progresses from point to point;

self-consciousness is deepened and quickened as generation succeeds generation; the sympathies of the individual are multiplied and extended. But he that increases knowledge, increases sorrow; most progress is most failure; the soul climbs the heights only to perish there. Every day the sense of joy grows more acute; every day the soul grows more enlarged; and every day the power to put our best attainments to use diminishes. "And how dieth the wise man? As the fool. Therefore I hated life; yea, I hated all my labour that I had taken under the sun." The poem is, indeed, an Ecclesiastes of pagan religion. The assurance of extinction is the worm which gnaws at the heart of the rose:

> It is so horrible
> I dare at times imagine to my need
> Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
> Unlimited in capability
> For joy, as this is in desire for joy.

But this is no better than a dream; Zeus could not but have revealed it, were it possible. Browning does not bring his Cleon, as Pater brings his Marius, into the Christian catacombs, where the image of the Shepherd bearing his lamb might interpret the mystery of death, nor to that house of Cecilia where Marius sees a new joy illuminating every face. Cleon has heard of Paulus and of Christus, but who can suppose that a mere barbarian Jew

> Hath access to a secret shut from us?

The doctrine of Christ, preached on the island by certain slaves, is reported by an intelligent listener to be one which no sane man can accept. And Cleon

will not squander the time that might be well employed in studying the proportions of a man or in combining the moods of music—the later hours of a philosopher and a poet—on the futile creed of slaves.

Immortality and Divine love—these were the great words pronounced by Paul and by Christ. *Cleon* is the despairing cry of Pagan culture for the life beyond the grave which would attune to harmony the dissonances of earth, and render intelligible its mournful obscurities. *Saul*, in the completed form of 1855, and *An Epistle of Karshish* are, the one a prophecy, the other a divination, of the mystery of the love of God in the life and death of his Son. The culminating moment in the effort of David by which he rouses to life the sunken soul of the King, the moment towards which all others tend, is that in which he finds in his own nature love as God's ultimate gift, and assured that in this, as in other gifts, the creature cannot surpass the Creator, he breaks forth into a prophecy of God's love made perfect in weakness:

> O Saul, it shall be
> A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me
> Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a Hand like this hand
> Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!

What follows in the poem is only the awe, the solemnity of this discovery which has come not through any processes of reasoning but by a passionate interpretation of the enthusiasm of love and self-sacrifice in David's own heart; only this awe, and the seeming extension of his throbbing emotion and pent knowledge over the face of external nature, until night passes and with the dawn earth and heaven resume their wonted ways. The case of Lazarus as studied by Karshish

the Arabian physician results not in a rapturous prophecy like that of David, but in a stupendous conjecture of the heart which all the scepticism of the brain of a man of science cannot banish or reduce to insignificance. The unaccountable fascination of this case of mania, subinduced by epilepsy, is not to be resisted; Karshish would write, if he could, of more important matters than the madman of Bethany; he would record his discoveries in scalp-disease, describe the peculiar qualities of Judea's gum-tragacanth, and disclose the secret of those virtues derived from the mottled spiders of the tombs. But the face of Lazarus, patient or joyous, the strange remoteness in his gaze, his singular valuations of objects and events, his great ardour, his great calm, his possession of some secret which gives new meanings to all things, the perfect logic of his irrationality, his unexampled gentleness and love—these are memories which the keen-sighted Arabian physician is unable to put by, so curious, so attaching a potency lies in the person of this man who holds that he was dead and rose again. Karshish has a certain sense of shame that he, a man learned in all the wisdom of his day, should be so deeply moved. And yet how the thought of the secret possessed by this Judean maniac—it is the secret of Jesus—fills and expands the soul!

> The very God! think, Abib: dost thou think?
> So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too—
> So through the thunder comes a human voice
> Saying "O heart I made, a heart beats here!
> Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
> Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
> But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
> And thou must love me who have died for thee!"

Science has at least something to consider in a thought so strangely potent.

A nineteenth-century sceptic's exposition of his Christian faith is the paradoxical subject of *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, and it is one which admirably suited that side of Browning's genius which leaned towards intellectual casuistry. But the poem is not only skilful casuistry—and casuistry, let it be remembered, is not properly the art of defending falsehood but of determining truth,—it is also a character-study chosen from the age of doubt; a dramatic monologue with an appropriate *mise en scène*; a display of fence and thrust which as a piece of art and wit rewards an intelligent spectator. That Cardinal Wiseman sat for the Bishop's portrait is a matter of little consequence; the merit of the study is independent of any connection with an individual; it answers delightfully the cynical—yet not wholly cynical—question: How, for our gain in both worlds, can we best economise our scepticism and make a little belief go far?[1] The nineteenth century is not precisely the age of the martyrs, or, if we are to find them, we must in general turn to politics and to science; Bishop Blougram does not pique himself on a genius for martyrdom; if he fights with beasts, it is on this occasion with a very small one, a lynx of the literary tribe, and in the arena of his own dining-room over the after-dinner wine. He is pre-eminently a man of his time, when the cross and its doctrine can be comfortably borne; both he and his table-companion, honoured for this one occasion only with the episcopal invitation, appreciate the good

[1] Browning maintained to Gavan Duffy that his treatment of the Cardinal was generous.

things of this world, but the Bishop has a vast advantage over the maker of "lively lightsome articles" for the reviews, and he uses his advantage, it must be confessed, to the full. We are in company with no petty man while we read the poem and hear the great Bishop roll out, with easy affluence, his long crumpled mind. He is delightfully frank and delightfully subtle; concealing himself by self-disclosure; opulent in ideas; shifting the pea of truth dexterously under the three gilded thimbles; blandly condescending and amiably contemptuous; a little feline, for he allows his adversary a moment's freedom to escape and then pounces upon him with the soft-furred claws; assured of his superiority in the game, yet using only half his mind; fencing with one arm pinioned; chess-playing with a rook and pawn given to his antagonist; or shall we say chess-playing blindfold and seeing every piece upon the board? Is *Bishop Blougram's Apology* a poem at all? some literary critics may ask. And the answer is that through it we make acquaintance with one of Browning's most genial inventions—the great Bishop himself, and that if Gigadibs were not present we could never have seen him at the particular angle at which he presents himself in his condescending play with truths and half-truths and quarter-truths, adapted to a smaller mind than his own. The sixteenth century gave us a Montaigne, and the seventeenth century a Pascal. Why should not the nineteenth century of mundane comforts, of doubt troubled by faith, and faith troubled by doubt, produce a new type—serious yet humorous—in an episcopal Pascal-Montaigne?

Browning's moral sympathies, we may rest assured,

do not go with one who like Blougram finds satisfaction in things realised on earth; one who declines—at least as he represents himself for the purposes of argument—to press forward to things which he cannot attain but might nobly follow after. But Browning's intellectual interest is great in seeing all that a Blougram can say for himself; and as a destructive piece of criticism directed against the position of a Gigadibs what he says may really be effective. The Bishop frankly admits that the unqualified believer, the enthusiast, is more fortunate than he; he, Sylvester Blougram, is what he is, and all that he can do is to make the most of the nature allotted to him. That there has been a divine revelation he cannot absolutely believe; but neither can he absolutely disbelieve. Unbelief is sterile; belief is fruitful, certainly for this world, probably for the next, and he elects to believe. Having chosen to believe, he cannot be too pronounced and decisive in his faith; he will never attempt to eliminate certain articles of the *credenda*, and so "decrassify" his faith, for to this process, if once begun, there is no end; having donned his uniform, he will wear it, laces and spangles and all. True, he has at times his chill fits of doubt; but is not this the probation of faith? Does not a life evince the ultimate reality that is within us? Are not acts the evidence of a final choice, of a deepest conviction? And has he not given his vote for the Christian religion?

> With me faith means perpetual unbelief
> Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot,
> Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.

When the time arrives for a beatific vision Blougram will be ready to adapt himself to the new state of

things. Is not the best pledge of his capacity for future adaptation to a new environment this—that being in the world he is worldly? We must not lose the training of each successive stage of evolution by for ever projecting ourselves half way into the next. So rolls on the argument to its triumphant conclusion—

> Fool or knave?
> Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave
> When there's a thousand diamond weights between?

Only at the last, were it not that we know that there is a firmer ground for Blougram than this on which he takes his stand in after-dinner controversy, we might be inclined to close the subject by adapting to its uses the title of a pamphlet connected with the Kingsley and Newman debate—"But was not Mr Gigadibs right after all?" Worsted in sword-play he certainly was; but the soul may have its say, and the soul, armed with its instincts of truth, is a formidable challenger.

Chapter X

Close of Mrs Browning's Life

WHEN *Men and Women* was published in the autumn of 1855 the Brownings were again in Paris. An impulsive friend had taken an apartment for them in the Rue de Grenelle, facing east, and in all that concerned comfort splendidly mendacious. After some weeks of misery and illness Mrs Browning was conveyed to less glittering but more hospitable rooms in the Rue du Colisée by a desperate husband—"That darling Robert carried me into the carriage, swathed past possible breathing, over face and respirator in woollen shawls. No, he wouldn't set me down even to walk up the fiacre steps, but shoved me in upside down in a struggling bundle."[1] Happily the winter was of a miraculous mildness. Mrs Browning worked at *Aurora Leigh* in "a sort of *furia*," and Browning set himself to the task—a fruitless one as it proved—of rehandling and revising *Sordello*: "I lately gave time and pains," he afterwards told Milsand in his published dedication of the poem, "to turn my work into what the many might,—instead of what the few must—like: but after all I imagined another thing at first, and therefore leave as I find it"—proud but warrantable words. Some of his leisure was given to vigorous and not unsuccessful efforts in drawing. At the theatre he saw Ristori

[1] Letters of E. B. B. (To Mrs Jameson), ii. 221.

as Medea and admired her, but with qualifications. At Monckton Milnes's dinner-table he met Mignet and Cavour, and George Sand crowned with an ivy-wreath and "looking like herself." Mrs Browning records with pleasure that her husband's hostility to the French government had waned; at least he admitted that he was sick of the Opposition.

In May 1856 tidings from London of the illness of Kenyon caused him serious anxiety; he would gladly have hastened to attend upon so true and dear a friend, but this Kenyon would not permit. A month later he and Mrs Browning were in occupation of Kenyon's house in Devonshire Place, which he had lent to them for the summer, but the invalid had sought for restoration of his health in the Isle of Wight. On the day that Mr Barrett heard of his daughter's arrival he ordered his family away from London. Mrs Browning once more wrote to him, but the letter received no answer. "Mama," said little Pen earnestly, "if you've been very, very naughty I advise you to go into the room and say, '*Papa, I'll be dood.*'" But the situation, as Mrs Browning sadly confesses, was hopeless. Some companionship with her sister Arabel and her brothers was gained by a swift departure from London in August for Ventnor whither the Wimpole Street household, leaving its master behind, had been banished, and there "a happy sorrowful two weeks" were spent. At Cowes a grief awaited Browning and his wife, for they found Kenyon kind as ever but grievously broken in health and depressed in spirits. A short visit to Mrs Browning's married sister at Taunton closed the summer and autumn in England. Before the end of October they were on their way to Florence. "The

Brownings are long gone back now," wrote Dante Rossetti in December, "and with them one of my delights—an evening resort where I never felt unhappy. How large a part of the real world, I wonder, are those two small people?—taking meanwhile so little room in any railway carriage and hardly needing a double bed at the inn."

The great event of the autumn for the Brownings and for the lovers of English poetry was the publication of *Aurora Leigh*. Its popularity was instantaneous; within a fortnight a second edition was called for; there was no time to alter even a comma. "That golden-hearted Robert," writes Mrs Browning, "is in ecstasies about it—far more than if it all related to a book of his own." The volume was dedicated to John Kenyon; but before the year was at an end Kenyon was dead. Since the birth of their son he had enlarged the somewhat slender incomings of his friends by the annual gift of one hundred pounds, "in order," says the editor of Mrs Browning's Letters, "that they might be more free to follow their art for its own sake only." By his will he placed them for the future above all possibility of straitened means. To Browning he left 6,500 *l.*, to Mrs Browning 4,500 *l.* "These," adds Mr F. G. Kenyon, "were the largest legacies in a very generous will—the fitting end to a life passed in acts of generosity and kindness to those in need." The gain to the Brownings was shadowed by a sense of loss. "Christmas came," says Mrs Browning, "like a cloud." For the length of three winter months she did not stir out of doors. Then arrived spring and sunshine, carnival time and universal madness in Florence, with streets "one gigantic pantomime." Penini begged

importunately for a domino, and could not be refused; and Penini's father and mother were for once drawn into the vortex of Italian gaiety. When at the great opera ball a little figure in mask and domino was struck on the shoulder with the salutation "Bella mascherina!" it was Mrs Browning who received the stroke, with her husband, also in domino, by her side. The absence of real coarseness in the midst of so much seeming license, and the perfect social equality gave her a gratifying impression of her Florentines.

In April it was summer weather; the drives of former days in the Cascine and to Bellosguardo, where a warm-hearted friend, Miss Isa Blagden, occupied a villa, were resumed. An American authoress of wider fame since her book of 1852 than even the authoress of *Aurora Leigh*, Mrs Beecher Stowe, was in Florence, and somewhat to their surprise she charmed both Browning and his wife by her simplicity and earnestness, her gentle voice and refinement of manner—"never," says Mrs Browning, "did lioness roar more softly." All pointed to renewed happiness; but before April was over pain of a kind that had a peculiar sting left Mrs Browning for a time incapable of any other feeling. Her father was dead, and no word of affection had been uttered at the last; if there was water in the rock it never welled forth. The kindly meant effort of a relative to reopen friendly communications between Mr Barrett and his daughters, not many months previously, had for its only result the declaration that they had disgraced the family.[1] At first Mrs Browning was crushed and could shed no tear; she remained for many days in a state of miserable

[1] F. G. Kenyon. *Letters of E. B. B.*, ii. 263.

prostration; it was two months before she could write a letter to anyone outside the circle of her nearest kinsfolk.

Once more the July heat in Florence—"a composition of Gehenna and Paradise"—drove the Brownings to the Baths of Lucca. Miss Blagden followed them, and also young Lytton came, ailing, it was thought, from exposure to the sun. His indisposition soon grew serious and declared itself as a gastric fever. For eight nights Isa Blagden sat by his bedside as nurse; for eight other nights Browning took her place. His own health remained vigorous. Each morning he bathed in a rapid mountain stream; each evening and morning he rode a mountain pony; and in due time he had the happiness of seeing the patient, although still weak and hollow cheeked, convalescent and beginning to think of "poems and apple puddings," as Mrs Browning declares, "in a manner other than celestial." It had been a summer, she said in September, full of blots, vexations, anxieties. Three days after these words were written a new and grave anxiety troubled her and her husband, for their son, who had been looking like a rose—"like a rose possessed by a fairy" is his mother's description—was attacked in the same way as Lytton. "Don't be unhappy for *me*," said Pen; "think it's a poor little boy in the street, and be just only a little sorry, and not unhappy at all." Within less than a fortnight he was well enough to have "agonising visions of beefsteak pies and buttered toast seen in *mirage*"; but his mother mourned for the rosy cheeks and round fat little shoulders, and confessed that she herself was worn out in body and soul.

The winter at Florence was the coldest for many years; the edges of the Arno were frozen; and in the spring of 1858 Mrs Browning felt that her powers of resistance, weakened by a year of troubles and anxieties, had fallen low. Browning himself was in vigorous health. When he called in June on Hawthorne he looked younger and even handsomer than he had looked two years previously, and his gray hairs seemed fewer. "He talked," Hawthorne goes on, "a wonderful quantity in a little time." That evening the Hawthornes spent at Casa Guidi. Mrs Browning is described by the American novelist as if she were one of the singular creatures of his own imagination—no earthly woman but one of the elfin race, yet sweetly disposed towards human beings; a wonder of charm in littleness; with a shrill yet sweet tenuity of voice; "there is not such another figure in the world; and her black ringlets cluster into her neck, and make her face look whiter by their sable perfection." Browning himself was "very efficient in keeping up conversation with everybody, and seemed to be in all parts of the room and in every group at the same moment; a most vivid and quick-thoughted person—logical and common-sensible, as, I presume, poets generally are in their daily talk." "His conversation," says Hawthorne, speaking of a visit to Miss Blagden at Bellosguardo, "has the effervescent aroma which you cannot catch even if you get the very words that seem to be imbued with it. . . . His nonsense is of very genuine and excellent quality, the true babble and effervescence of a bright and powerful mind; and he lets it play among his friends with the faith and simplicity of a child."

When summer came it was decided to join Browning's father and sister in Paris, and accompany them to some French seaside resort, where Mrs Browning could have the benefit of a course of warm salt-water baths. To her the sea was a terror, but railway-travelling was repose, and Browning suggested in the way from Marseilles to Paris that they might "ride, ride together, for ever ride" during the remainder of their lives in a first-class carriage with for-ever renewed supplies of French novels and *Galignanis*. They reached Paris on the elder Mr Browning's birthday, and found him radiant at the meeting with his son and grandson, looking, indeed, ten years younger than when they had last seen his face. Paris, Mrs Browning declares, was her "weakness," Italy her "passion"; Florence itself was her "chimney-corner," where she "could sulk and be happy." The life of the brilliant city, which "murmurs so of the fountain of intellectual youth for ever and ever," quickened her heart-beats; its new architectural splendours told of the magnificence in design and in its accomplishment of her hero the Emperor. And here she and her husband met their helpful friend of former days, Father Prout, and they were both grieved and cheered by the sight of Lady Elgin, a paralytic, in her garden-chair, not able to articulate a word, but bright and gracious as ever, "the eloquent soul full and radiant, alive to both worlds." The happiness in presence of such a victory of the spirit was greater than the pain.

Having failed to find agreeable quarters at Étretat, where Browning in a "fine phrenzy" had hired a wholly unsuitable house with a potato-patch for view,

and escaped from his bad bargain, a loser of some francs, at his wife's entreaty, they settled for a short time at Havre—"detestable place," Mrs Browning calls it—in a house close to the sea and surrounded by a garden. On a bench by the shore Mrs Browning could sit and win back a little strength in the bright August air. The stay at Havre, depressing to Browning's spirits, was for some eight weeks. In October they were again in Paris, where Mrs Browning's sister, Arabel, was their companion. The year was far advanced and a visit to England was not in contemplation. Towards the middle of the month they were once more in motion, journeying by slow stages to Florence. A day was spent at Chambéry "for the sake of les Charmettes and Rousseau." When Casa Guidi was at length reached, it was only a halting-place on the way to Rome. Winter had suddenly rushed in and buried all Italy in snow; but when they started for Rome in a carriage kindly lent by their American friends, the Eckleys, it was again like summer. The adventures of the way were chiefly of a negative kind—occasioned by precipices over which they were not thrown, and banditti who never came in sight; but in a quarrel between oxen-drivers, one of whom attacked the other with a knife, Browning with characteristic energy dashed between them to the terror of the rest of the party; his garments were the only serious sufferers from his zeal as mediator.

The apartment engaged at Rome was that of the earlier visit of 1853-54, in the Via Bocca di Leone, "rooms swimming all day in sunshine." On Christmas morning Mrs Browning was able to accompany her husband to St Peter's to hear the silver trumpets.

But January froze the fountains, and the north wind blew with force. Mrs Browning had just completed a careful revision of *Aurora Leigh*, and now she could rest, enjoy the sunshine streaming through their six windows, or give herself up to the excitement of Italian politics as seen through the newspapers in the opening of a most eventful year. "Robert and I," she wrote on the eve of the declaration of war between Austria and Victor Emmanuel, "have been of one mind lately on these things, which comforts me much." She had also the satisfaction of health enjoyed at least by proxy, for her husband had never been more full of vigour and the spirit of enjoyment. In the freezing days of January he was out of his bed at six o'clock, and away for a brisk morning walk with Mr Eckley. The loaf at breakfast diminished "by Gargantuan slices." Into the social life of Rome he threw himself with ardour. For a fortnight immediately after Christmas he was out every night, sometimes with double and treble engagements. "Dissipations," says Mrs Browning, "decidedly agree with Robert, there's no denying that, though he's horribly hypocritical, and 'prefers an evening with me at home.'" He gathered various coloured fragments of life from the outer world and brought them home to brighten her hours of imprisonment.

When they returned to Florence in May the Grand Duke had withdrawn, the city was occupied by French troops, and there was unusual animation in the streets. Browning shared to some extent in his wife's alienation from the policy of England, and believed, but with less than her enthusiastic confidence, in the good intentions towards Italy of the French Emperor. He

subscribed his ten scudi a month to the Italian war fund, and rewarded Pen for diligence in his lessons with half a paul a day, which the boy might give as his own contribution to the cause of Italian independence. The French and the Italian tricolour flags displayed by Pen, adorned the terrace. In June the sun beat upon Florence with unusual fierceness, but it was a month of battles, and with bulletins of the war arriving twice a day they could not bear to remove to any quiet retreat at a distance from the centre. It was not curiosity that detained them but the passion for Italy, the joy in generous effort and great deeds. In the rebound, as Mrs Browning expresses it, from high-strung hopes and fears for Italy they found themselves drawn to the theatre where Salvini gave his wonderful impersonation of Othello and his Hamlet, "very great in both, Robert thought," so commented Mrs Browning, "as well as I." [1] The strain of excitement was indeed excessive for Mrs Browning's failing physical strength; there was in it something almost febrile. Yet the fact is noteworthy that the romantic figures secured much less of her interest than the men of prudent statesmanship. She esteemed Cavour highly; she wholly distrusted Mazzini. She justified Louis Napoleon in concessions which she regarded as an

[1] "Browning was intimately acquainted," writes Miss Anna Swanwick, "with Salvini." What especially lived in Browning's memory as transcending everything else he had witnessed on the stage was Salvini's impersonation of the blind Œdipus, and in particular one incident: a hand is laid on the blind man's shoulder, which he supposes the hand of one of his sons; he discovers it to be the hand of Antigone; the sudden transition from a look of fiery hate to one of ineffable tenderness was unsurpassable in its mastery of dramatic expression. (Condensed from "Anna Swanwick, a Memoir and Recollections," 1903, pp. 132, 133.)

navoidable part of diplomacy directed to ends which ould not be immediately attained. Garibaldi was "hero," but somewhat alarming in his heroisms—a grand child," "not a man of much brain." After the ctories of Magenta and Solferino came what seemed o many the great betrayal of Villafranca. For a ay the busts and portraits of the French Emperor ddenly disappeared from the shop-windows of lorence, and even Mrs Browning would not let her oy wear his Napoleon medal. But the busts re-urned to their places, and Mrs Browning's faith in apoleon sprang up anew; it was not he who was ne criminal; the selfish powers of Europe had "forced is hand" and "truncated his great intentions." She ejoiced in the magnificent spectacle of dignity and alm presented by the people of Italy. And yet her ll from the clouds to earth on the announcement f peace with Austria was a shattering experience. leep left her, or if she slept her dreams were affected y "inscrutable articles of peace and endless pro-sional governments." Night after night her husband atched beside her, and in the day he not only gave is boy the accustomed two hours' lesson on the iano, but replaced the boy's mother as teacher of ose miscellaneous lessons, which had been her ducational province. "Robert has been perfect to ne," expressed Mrs Browning's feelings in a word.

Another anxiety gave Browning an opportunity hich he turned to account in a way that renders onour and gratitude his due from all lovers of nglish letters. At a great old age Landor, who esided with his family at Fiesole, still retained his iolent and intractable temper; in his home there

was much to excite his leonine wrath and sense of intolerable wrong. Three times he had quitted his villa, with vows never to return to it, and three times he had been led back. When for a fourth time—like a feeble yet majestic Lear—one hot summer day toward noon, he flung himself, or was flung, out of doors with only a few pauls in his pocket, it was to Casa Guidi that he made his way broken-hearted, yet breathing forth wrath.[1] Browning had often said, as his wife tells her sister-in-law, that he owed more as a writer to Landor than to any other contemporary. He resolved to set things right, if possible; and if not, to make the best of a case that could not be entirely amended. A visit to the villa assured him that reconciliation was out of the question. He provided for Landor's immediate wants; communicated with Landor's brothers in England, who were prompt in arranging for a regular allowance to be administered by Browning; became the old man's guide and guardian; soothed his wounded spirit, although according to Mrs Browning, not often happy when he attempted compliments, with generous words and ready quotations from Landor's own writings; and finally settled him in Florence under the care of Mrs Browning's faithful maid Wilson, who watched over him during the remainder of his life.[3] To his incredulous wife Browning spoke of Landor's sweetness

[1] Story says that Landor "was turned out of doors by his wife and children." He had conveyed the villa to his wife. It is Story who compares Landor to King Lear. "Conversations in a Studio," p. 436.

[2] Letters of E. B. B., ii. 354.

[3] When Browning at Rome was invited to dine with the Prince of Wales (March 1859) by the desire of Queen Victoria, Mrs Browning told him to "eschew compliments," of his infelicity in uttering which she gives amusing examples. *Letters of E. B. B.*, ii. 309, 310.

nd gentleness, nor was he wrong in ascribing these ualities to the old lion. She admitted that he had enerous impulses, but feared that her husband would efore long become, like other friends of Landor, the bject of some enraged suspicion. "Nothing coheres n him," she writes, "either in his opinions, or, I fear, ffections." But Landor, whose courtesy and refinement she acknowledges, had also a heart that was apable of loyal love and gratitude. After the first urst of rage against the Fiesole household had spent self, he beguiled the time in perpetuating his indignations in an innocent and classical form—that f Latin alcaics directed against one private and ne public foe—his wife and the Emperor Louis Napoleon.[1]

Landor's affairs threatened to detain the Brownings n Florence longer than they desired, now that peace ad come and it was not indispensable to run out of oors twice a day in order to inspect the bulletins. But after three weeks of very exhausting illness, Mrs Browning needed change of air. As soon as her trength allowed, she was lifted into a carriage and hey journeyed, as in the year 1850, to the neighourhood of Siena. She reached the villa which had een engaged by Story's aid, with the sense of "a eculiar frailty of being." Though confined to the ouse, the fresher air by day and the night winds radually revived her strength and spirits. The ilence and repose were "heavenly things" to her: he "pretty dimpled ground covered by low vine-

[1] On Browning's action in the affairs of Landor see Forster's *Life of Landor*, and the letters of Browning in vol. ii. of Henry James's *Life of Story* (pp. 6-11).

yards" rested her eyes and her mind; and for excitements, instead of reports of battle-fields there were slow-fading scarlet sunsets over purple hills. A kind Prussian physician, Gresonowsky, who had attended Mrs Browning in Florence, and who entered sympathetically into her political feelings, followed her uninvited to Siena and gave her the benefit of his care, declining all recompense. The good friends from America, the Storys, were not far off, and Landor, after a visit to Story, was placed in occupation of rooms not a stone's-cast from their villa. With Pen it was a time of rejoicing, for his father had bought the boy a Sardinian pony of the colour of his curls, and he was to be seen galloping through the lanes "like Puck," to use Browning's comparison, on a dragon-fly's back.[1]

The gipsy instinct, the desire of wandering, had greatly declined with both husband and wife since the earlier days in Italy. Yet when they returned to Casa Guidi it was only for six weeks. Even at the close of the visit to Siena Mrs Browning had recovered but a slender modicum of strength; she did not dare to enter the cathedral, for there were steps to climb. At Florence she felt her old vitality return and her spirits rose. But the climate of Rome was considered by Dr Gresonowsky more suitable for winter, and towards the close of November they took their departure, flying from the Florentine tramontana. The carriage was furnished with novels of Balzac, and Pen's pony was of the party. The rooms taken in the Via del Tritone were bright and sunny; but a

[1] See, for this residence at Siena, an interesting letter of Story to C. Eliot Norton in Henry James's *W. W. Story*, vol. ii. pp. 14, 15.

sh visit to the jeweller Castellani, to see and touch ie swords presented by Roman citizens to Napoleon I. and Victor Emmanuel, threw back Mrs Browning to all her former troubles of a delicate chest and ft her "as weak as a rag." Tidings of the death of sady Elgin seemed to tell only of a peaceful release om a period of imprisonment in the body, but the ss of Mrs Jameson was a painful blow. Rome at time of grave political apprehensions was almost mpty of foreigners; but among the few visitors who ad courage to stay were the sculptor Gibson and heodore Parker—now near the close of his life—hose *tête-à-têtes* were eloquent of beliefs and disbeliefs. As the spring advanced the authoress of "The Mill on the Floss" was reported to be now and gain visible in Rome, "with her elective affinity," as Irs Browning puts it, "on the Corso walking, or in ne Vatican musing. Always together." A granddaughter of Lord Byron—"very quiet and very ntense"—was among the visitors at the Via del Tritone, and Lady Marion Alford, "very eager about terature and art and Robert," for all which eagernesses Irs Browning felt bound to care for her. The artists Burne-Jones and Prinsep had made Browning's acquaintance at Siena; Prinsep now introduced him to ome of the by-ways of popular life in Rome. Together they witnessed the rivalry of two improvisatori, poetic gamecocks, whose efforts were stimulated by the nnouncement that a great poet from England was resent; together they listened to the forbidden Hymn to Garibaldi played in Gigi's *osteria*, witnessed he dignified blindness of the Papal gendarmes to the ffence, while Gigi liberally plied them with drink;

and together, to relieve the host of all fear of more revolutionary airs, they took carriages with their musicians and drove to see the Coliseum by moonlight.[1]

The project of a joint volume of poems on the Italian question by Browning and his wife, which had made considerable progress towards realisation, had been dropped after Villafranca, when Browning destroyed his poem; but Mrs Browning had advanced alone and was now revising proofs of her slender contribution to the poetry of politics, *Poems before Congress*. She wrote them, she says, simply to deliver her soul—"to get the relief to my conscience and heart, which comes from a pent-up word spoken or a tear shed." She can hardly have anticipated that they would be popular in England; but she was not prepared for one poem which denounced American slavery being misinterpreted into a curse pronounced upon England. "Robert was *furious*" against the offending Review, she says; "I never saw him so enraged about a criticism;" but by-and-by he "didn't care a straw." His wife, on the other hand, was more deeply pained by the blindness and deafness of the British public towards her husband's genius; nobody "except a small knot of pre-Rafaelite men" did him justice; his publisher's returns were a proof of this not to be gainsaid—not one copy of his poems had for six months been sold, while in America he was already a power. For the poetry of political enthusiasm he had certainly no vocation. When Savoy was surrendered to France Mrs Browning suffered some pain lest her Emperor's generosity might seem compromised

[1] Condensed from information given by Prinsep to Mrs Orr, *Life and Letters of R. B.*, pp. 234-37.

rowning admitted that the liberation of Italy was great action, adding cynically of his future Prince ohenstiel-Schwangau, "But he has taken eighteen- ence for it, which is a pity." During the winter e wrote much. "Robert deserves no reproaches," s wife tells her friend Miss Haworth in May, "for e has been writing a good deal this winter—working a long poem, which I have not seen a line of, and roducing short lyrics which I have seen, and may eclare worthy of him." Mr F. G. Kenyon con- ctures that the long poem is not unlikely to have en *Mr Sludge the Medium*, for Home's performances, he says, were at this time rampant.[1] As hitherto, oth husband and wife showed their poems each to ie other only when the poems were complete; thus ke a pair of hardy friends they maintained their dependence. Even when they read, there was no ading aloud; Mrs Browning was indefatigable in er passion for books; her husband, with muscular nergy impatient for action, found it impossible to ad for long at a single sitting.

On June 4th 1860 they left Rome, travelling by ettura through Orvieto and Chiusi to their home in lorence.[2] The journey fatigued Mrs Browning, but n arriving they had the happiness of finding Landor ell; he looked not less than magnificent, displaying the most beautiful sea-foam of a beard . . . all in a url and white bubblement of beauty." Wilson had ie old man under happy control; only once had he

[1] *Letters of E. B. B.*, ii. 388, note. Mr Kenyon suggests *A Death in e Desert* as at least possibly meant. *The Ring and the Book* "certainly d not yet been begun."

[2] Halting at Siena, whence Browning wrote an account of the journey Story: Henry James's *W. W. Story*, ii. pp. 50-52.

thrown his dinner out of the window; that he should be at odds with all the world was inevitable, and that all the world should be in the wrong was exhilarating and restorative. The plans for the summer were identical with those of the preceding year; the same "great lonely villa" near Siena was occupied again the same "deep soothing silence" lapped to rest Mrs Browning's spirits; Landor, her "adopted son"—a son of eighty-six years old—was hard by as he had been last summer. The neighbourhood of Miss Blagden was this year an added pleasure. "The little eager lady," as Henry James describes her, "with gentle, gay black eyes," had seen much, read much, written already a little (with more to follow), but better than all else were her generous heart and her helpful hand. The season was one of unusual coolness for Italy. Pen's pony, as before, flashed through the lanes and along the roads. Browning had returned from Rome in robust health, and looking stouter in person than six months previously. Now, while a tenant of the Villa Alberti, he spent his energies in long rides, sometimes rides of three or four continuous hours. On returning from such careers on horseback little inclination, although he had his solitary room in which to work, remained for the pursuit of poetry.

The departure for Rome was early—about September; in the Via Felice rooms were found. A new and great sorrow had fallen upon Mrs Browning—her sister Henrietta, Mrs Surtees Cook, was dead, leaving behind her three young children. Mrs Browning could not shed tears nor speak of her grief: she felt tired and beaten by the pain; and tried to persuade herself that for one who believed

ıe invisible world to be so near, such pain was but weakness. Her husband was able to do little, but ɔ shared in his degree in the sense of loss, and pro-ɔcted her from the intrusion of untimely visitors. ir John Bowring was admitted because he presented letter of introduction and had intimate relations ïith the French Emperor; his ridicule of the volunteer ovement in England, with its cry of "Riflemen, rm!" was grateful to Mrs Browning's political feelings. rench troops were now in Rome; their purpose was omewhat ambiguous; but Pen had fraternised with ıe officers on the Pincio, had learnedly discussed hopin and Stephen Heller with them, had been ssured that they did not mean to fight for the Holy ather, and had invited "ever so many of them" to ome and see mamma—an invitation which they were o discreet to accept. Mrs Browning's excitement out public affairs had somewhat abated; yet she atched with deep interest the earlier stages of the great ruggle in America; and she did not falter in her pes for Italy; by intrigues and smuggling the ewspapers which she wished to see were obtained rough the courteous French generals. But her irits were languid; "I gather myself up by fits nd starts," she confesses, "and then fall back."

Apart from his anxieties for his wife's health and ıe unfailing pleasure in his boy, whom a French or alian abbé now instructed, Browning was wholly sorbed in one new interest. He had long been an ccomplished musician; in Paris he had devoted imself to drawing; now his passion was for modelling clay, and the work proceeded under the direction nd in the studio of his friend, the sculptor Story.

His previous studies in anatomy stood him in good stead; he made remarkable progress, and six hours a day passed as if in an enchantment. He ceased even to read; "nothing but clay does he care for," says Mrs Browning smilingly, "poor lost soul." The union of intellectual energy with physical effort in such work gave him the complete satisfaction for which he craved. His wife "grudged a little," she says, the time stolen from his special art of poetry, but she saw that his health and spirits gained from his happy occupation. Of late, he had laboured irregularly at verse; fits of active effort were followed by long intervals during which production seemed impossible. And some vent was necessary for the force coiled up within him; if this were not to be obtained, he wore himself out with a nervous impatience—"beating his dear head," as Mrs Browning describes it, "against the wall, simply because he sees a fly there, magnified by his own two eyes almost indefinitely into some Saurian monster." Now he was well and even exultant—"nothing ever," he declared, "made him so happy before." Of advancing years—Browning was now nearly forty-nine—the only symptoms were that he had lost his youthful slightness of figure, and that his beard and hair were somewhat blanched by time. "The women," his wife wrote to his sister, "adore him everywhere far too much for decency," and to herself he seemed "infinitely handsomer and more attractive" than when, sixteen years previously, she had first seen him. On the whole therefore she was well pleased with his new passion for clay, and could wish for him loads of the plastic stuff in which to riot. Afterwards, in his days of

orrow in London, when he compared the colour of is life to that of a snow-cloud, it seemed to him as one minute of these months at Rome would yield im gold enough to make the brightness of a year; e longed for the smell of the wet clay in Story's udio, where the songs of the birds, and the bleat f a goat coming through the little door to the ft, were heard.[1]

While hoping and planning for the future, his wife as not unaware of her own decline. "For the first me," she writes about December, "I have had pain n looking into Penini's face lately—which you will nderstand." And a little earlier: "I wish to live st as long as, and no longer than to grow in the ul." The winter was mild, though snow had fallen nce; a spell of colder weather was reserved for the nonth of May. They thought of meeting Browning's ather and sister in some picturesque part of the forest f Fontainebleau, or, if that should prove unsuitable, erhaps at Trouville. Mrs Browning, who had rmerly enjoyed the stir of life in Paris, now shrank om its noise and bustle. Her wish would be to reep into a cave for the whole year. At eight o'clock ach evening she left her sitting-room and sofa, and as in bed. Yet she trusted that when she could enture again into the open air she would be more apable of enduring the friction of the world. In lay she felt stronger, and saw visitors, among whom as Hans Andersen, "very earnest, very simple, very hildlike."[2] A little later she was cast down by the

[1] H. James's *W. W. Story*, vol. ii. pp. 111, 113.

[2] Henry James tells of a children's party at the Palazzo Barberini, ome, of several years earlier, when Hans Andersen read "The Ugly

death of Cavour—"that great soul which meditated and made Italy"; she could hardly trust herself to utter his name. It was evident to Browning that the journey to France could not be undertaken without serious risk. They had reached Casa Guidi, and there for the present she must take her rest.

The end came swiftly, gently. A bronchial attack attended with no more than the usual discomfort found her with diminished power of resistance. Browning had forebodings of evil, though there seemed to be no special cause to warrant his apprehension. On the last evening—June 28, 1861—she herself had no anticipation of what was at hand and talked of their summer plans. When she slept her slumber was heavy and disturbed. At four in the morning her husband was alarmed and sent to summon the doctor; but she assured him that his fears were exaggerated. Then inestimable words were spoken which lived forever in his heart. And so "smilingly, happily, with a face like a girl's," resting her head upon her husband's cheek, she passed away.

Duckling," and Browning, "The Pied Piper"; which led to "a grand march through the spacious Barberini apartment, with Story doing his best on a flute in default of bagpipes." *W. W. Story*, vol. i. p. 286.

[1] The circumstances of Mrs Browning's death are described as above but with somewhat fuller detail, in a letter of Browning to Miss Haworth July 20, 1861, first printed by Mrs Orr. Many details of interest will be found in a long letter of Story, Henry James's *W. W. Story*, vol. ii. pp. 61-68: "She talked with him and jested and gave expression to her love in the tenderest words; then, feeling sleepy, and he supporting her in his arms, she fell into a doze. In a few minutes, suddenly, her head dropped forward. He thought she had fainted, but she had gone forever." A painful account of the funeral service, "blundered through by a fat English parson," is given by Story.

Chapter XI

London : Dramatis Personæ

THE grief of the desolate man was an uncontrollable passion ; his heart was strong and all its strength entered into its sorrow. Miss Blagden, " perfect in all kindness," took motherly possession of the boy, and persuaded his father to accompany Penini to her villa at Bellosguardo. When all that was needful at Casa Guidi had been done, Browning's first thought was to abandon Italy for many a year, and hasten to London, where to have speech for a day or two at least with Mrs Browning's sister Arabel. " The cycle is complete," he said, looking round the sitting-room of Casa Guidi. " I want my new life," he wrote, " to resemble the last fifteen years as little as possible." Yet while he stayed in the accustomed rooms he held himself together ; " when I was moved," he says, " I began to go to pieces." [1] Yet something remained to sustain him. To one who has habitually given as well as received much not the least of the pangs of separation arises from the incapacity to render any further direct service. It fortified Browning's heart to know that much could be done, and in ways which his wife would have approved and desired, for her child. And as he himself had been also her care, it was his business now

[1] Letter to Story in Henry James's " W. W. Story," vol. ii. p. 91 and 97.

to see that his life fulfilled itself aright. Yet he breaks out in July: "No more 'house-keeping' for me, ever with my family. I shall grow still, I hope—but my root is taken, and remains." From the outward paraphernalia of death Browning, as Mrs Orr notices, shrank with aversion; it was partly the instinct by which a man seeks to preserve what is most sacred and most strong in his own feelings from the poor materialisms and the poor sentimentalisms of the grave; partly a belief that any advance of the heart towards what has been lost may be rather hindered than helped by the external circumstance surrounding the forsaken body. Browning took measures that his wife's grave should be duly cared for, given more than common distinction; but Florence became a place from which even for his own sake and the sake of her whose spirit lived within him he must henceforth keep aloof.

The first immediate claim upon Browning was that of duty to his father. On August 1st he left Florence for Paris, accompanied by Isa Blagden, who still watched over him and the boy. Two months were spent with his sister and the old man, still hale and strong of heart, at a place "singularly unspoiled, fresh and picturesque, and lovely to heart's content"—so Browning describes it—St Enogat, near St Malo. The solitary sea, the sands, the rocks, the green country gave him at least a breathing-space. Then he proceeded to London, not without an outbreak of his characteristic energy in over-coming the difficulties—which involved two hours of "weary battling"—of securing a horse-box for Pen's pony. At Amiens Tennyson, with his wife and children, was on the

latform. Browning pulled his hat over his face and vas unrecognised.[1] In "grim London," as he had alled it, though with a quick remorse at recollection f the kindness awaiting him, he had the comfort of aily intercourse with Miss Arabel Barrett.

It was decided that an English education, but not hat of a public school, would be best for the boy; he critical time for taking "the English stamp" must ot be lost; his father's instruction, aided by that of tutor, would suffice to prepare him for the University, nd he would have the advantage of the motherly are of his mother's favourite sister. Browning disrusted, he says to Story, "ambiguous natures and ationalities." Thus he bound himself to England nd to London, while at times he sighed for the beauty f Italian hills and skies. He shrank from society, lthough before long old friends, and especially Procter, nfirm and deaf, were not neglected. He found, or nade, business for himself; had "never so much to o or so little pleasure in doing it." The discomfort f London lodgings was before long exchanged for ne more congenial surroundings of a house by the ater-side in Warwick Crescent, which he occupied ntil 1887, two years before his death. The furniure and tapestries of Casa Guidi gave it an air of omfort and repose. "It was London," writes Mrs itchie, referring to her visits of a later date, "but ondon touched by some indefinite romance; the anal used to look cool and deep, the green trees used o shade the Crescent. . . . The house was an ordinary ondon house, but the carved oak furniture and apestries gave dignity to the long drawing-rooms, and

[1] H. James's "W. W. Story," vol. ii. p. 100.

pictures and books lined the stairs. In the garden a the back dwelt, at the time of which I am writing, tw weird gray geese, with quivering silver wings and lon throats, who used to come and meet their maste hissing and fluttering." In 1866 an owl—for Browr ing still indulged a fantasy of his own in the choic of pets—was "the light of our house," as a lette describes this bird of darkness, "for his tameness an engaging ways." The bird would kiss its master o the face, tweak his hair, and if one said "Poor ol fellow!" in a commiserating voice would assum a sympathetic air of depression.[1] Miss Barrett live hard by, in Delamere Terrace. With her on Sunday Browning listened at Bedford Chapel to the sermon of a non-conformist preacher, Thomas Jones, to som of which when published in 1884, he prefixed an in troduction. "The Welsh poet-preacher" was a man o humble origin possessed of a natural gift of eloquence which, with his "liberal humanity," drew Browning t become a hearer of his discourses.

He made no haste to give the public a new volum of verse. Mrs Browning had mentioned to a corres pondent, not long before her death, that her husban had then a considerable body of lyrical poetry in state of completion. An invitation to accept th editorship of the *Cornhill Magazine*, on Thackeray' retirement, was after some hesitation declined. H was now partly occupied with preparing for the pres whatever writings by his wife seemed suitable fo publication. In 1862 he issued with a dedication "t grateful Florence" her *Last Poems*; in 1863, he *Greek Christian Poets*; in 1865 he prepared a volum

[1] "Rossetti Papers," p. 302.

f Selections from her poems, and had the happiness f knowing that the number of her readers had rather ncreased than diminished. The efforts of self-constituted biographers to make capital out of the incidents f her life, and to publish such letters of hers as could e laid hands on, moved him to transports of indignaon, which break forth in a letter to his friend Miss lagden with unmeasured violence: what he felt with ne "paws" of these blackguards in his "very bowels" od knows; beast and scamp and knave and fool re terms hardly strong enough to relieve his wrath. uch sudden whirls of extreme rage were rare, yet ere characteristic of Browning, and were sometimes llowed by regret for his own distemperature. In 862 a gratifying task was laid on him—that of uperintending the three volume edition of his Poetical Vorks which was published in the following year. t the same time his old friend Forster, with help from rocter, was engaged in preparing the first—and the est—of the several Selections from Browning's poems; was at once an indication of the growing interest in is writings and an effective means towards extending heir influence. He set himself steadily to work out what as in him; he waited no longer upon his casual moods, ut girded his loins and kept his lamp constantly lit. His genius, such as it was—this was the field given him o till, and he must see that it bore fruit. "I certainly ill do my utmost to make the most of my poor self beore I die"—so he wrote in 1865. There were gains in uch a resolved method of work; but there were also osses. A man of so active a mind by planting imself before a subject could always find something o say; but it might happen that such sheer brain-

work was carried on by plying other faculties than those which give its highest value to poetry.[1]

In the late summer and early autumn of 1862 Browning, in company with his son, was among the Pyrenees at "green pleasant little Cambo, and then at Biarritz crammed," he says, "with gay people of whom I know nothing but their outsides." The sea and sands were more to his liking than the gay people. He had with him one book and no other—a Euripides in which he read vigorously, and that the readings were fruitful his later poetry of the Greek drama bears witness. At present however his creative work lay in another direction; the whole of "the Roman murder story"—the story of Pompilia and Guido and Caponsacchi—he describes as being pretty well in his head. It needed a long process of evolution before the murder story could uncoil its sinuous lengths in a series of volumes. The visit to Ste-Marie "a wild little place in Brittany" near Pornic, in the summer of 1863—a visit to be repeated in the two summers immediately succeeding—is directly connected with two of the poems of *Dramatis Personæ*. The story of *Gold Hair* and the landscape details of *James Lee's Wife* are alike derived from Pornic. The solitude of the little Breton hamlet soothed Browning's spirit. The "good, stupid and dirty" people of the village

[1] In 1863 Browning gave time and pains to revising his friend Story's *Roba di Roma*.

[2] In 1864 Browning again "braved the awful Biarritz" and stayed at Cambo. On this occasion he visted Fontarabia. An interesting letter from Cambo, undated as to time, is printed in Henry James's "W. W. Story," vol. ii. pp. 153-156. The year—1864—may be ascertained by comparing it with a letter addressed to F. T. Palgrave, given in Palgrave's Life, the date of this letter being Oct. 19, 1864. Browning in this letter to Story speaks of "the last two years in the dear rough Ste.-Marie.

ere seldom visible except on Sunday; there were litary walks of miles to be had along the coast; uit and milk, butter and eggs in abundance, and ese were Browning's diet. "I feel out of the very rth sometimes," he wrote, "as I sit here at the indow. . . . Such a soft sea, and such a mournful ind!" But the lulling charm of the place which, ough so different, brought back the old Siena mood, d not convert him into an idler. The mornings, hich began betimes, were given to work; in his way desperate resolve to be well occupied he informs iss Blagden (Aug. 18, 1863) that having yesterday ritten a poem of 120 lines, he means to keep writing hether he likes it or not.[1]

"With the spring of 1863," writes Mr Gosse, "a reat change came over Browning's habits. He had fused all invitations into society; but now, of even-gs, after he had put his boy to bed, the solitude eighed intolerably upon him. He told the present riter [Mr Gosse] long afterwards, that it suddenly ccurred to him on one such spring night in 1863 that is mode of life was morbid and unworthy, and, then id there, he determined to accept for the future every itable invitation which came to him." "Accordingly," oes on Mr Gosse, "he began to dine out, and in e process of time he grew to be one of the most miliar figures of the age at every dinner-table, ncert-hall, and place of refined entertainment in ondon. This, however, was a slow process." Mrs itchie refers to spoken words of Browning which

[1] Was the poem *Gold Hair*? If three stanzas were added to the first aft before the poem appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* the number of es would have been 120. Stanzas 21, 22 and 23 were added in e *Dramatis Personæ* version.

declared that it was "a mere chance whether he should live in the London house that he had taken and join in social life, or go away to some quiet retreat, and be seen no more." It was in a modified form the story of the "fervid youth grown man," in his own "Daniel Bartoli," who in his desolation, after the death of his lady,

> Trembled on the verge
> Of monkhood: trick of cowl and taste of scourge
> He tried: then, kicked not at the pricks perverse,
> But took again, for better or for worse,
> The old way of the world, and, much the same
> Man o' the outside, fairly played life's game.

Probably Browning had come to understand that in his relation to the past he was not more loyal in solitude than he might be in society; it was indeed the manlier loyalty to bear his full part in life. And as to his art, he felt that, with sufficient leisure to encounter the labour he had enjoined upon himself it mattered little whether the remaining time was spent in a cave or in a court; strength may encounter the seductions either of the hermitage or of the crowd and still be the victor:

> Strength may conclude in Archelaos' court,
> And yet esteem the silken company
> So much sky-scud, sea-froth, earth-thistledown,
> For aught their praise or blame should joy or grieve.
> Strength amid crowds as late in solitude
> May lead the still life, ply the wordless task.[1]

One cannot prescribe a hygiene to poets; the poet of passionate contemplation, such as was Wordsworth could hardly quicken or develop his peculiar faculty

[1] *Aristophanes' Apology* (spoken of Euripides).

y devotion to the entertainments of successive London seasons. And perhaps it is not certain that he genius of Browning was wholly a gainer by the uperficial excitations of the dinner table and the eception room. But the truth is, as Mrs Browning ad observed, that his energy was not exhausted by terary work, and that it preyed upon himself if no neans of escape were found. If he was not at the iano, or shaping clay, or at the drawing-board, or alking fast and far, inward disturbances were set up hich rent and frayed his mind. The pleasures of ociety both fatigued and rested Browning; they ertainly relieved him from the troubles of super-oundant force.

In 1864 *Dramatis Personæ* was published. It ight be described as virtually a third volume of *Men nd Women*. And yet a certain change of tone is iscernible. Italy is no longer the background of he human figures. There is perhaps less opulence colour; less of the manifold "joys of living." If gher points in the life of the spirit are not touched, e religious feeling has more of inwardness and is ore detached from external historical fact than it had er been before; there is more sense of resistance to nd victory over whatever may seem adverse to the e of the soul. In the poems which deal with love e situations and postures of the spirit are less simple nd are sometimes even strained; the fantastic and e grotesque occupy a smaller place; a plain dignity, a ave solemnity of style is attained in passages of *A eath in the Desert*, which had hardly been reached fore. Yet substantially the volume is a continuation the poems of 1855; except in one instance, where

Tennyson's method in *Maud*, that of a sequence c lyrics, is adopted, the methods are the same; th predominating themes of *Men and Women*, love, ar religion, are the predominating themes of *Dramati Personæ*. A slight metrical complication—the interna rhyme in the second line of each stanza of *Dîs alite visum* and in the third line of the quatrains of *Ma and Death*—may be noted as indicating Browning's lov of new metrical experiments. In the former of thes poems the experiment cannot be called a success; th clash of sounds, "a mass of brass," "walked an talked," and the like, seems too much as if an acciden had been converted into a rule.

Mr Sludge, "*the Medium*," the longest piece in th volume, has been already noticed. The story of th poor girl of Pornic, as Browning in a letter calls he attracted him partly because it presented a psycho logical curiosity, partly because he cared to paint he hair in words,—gold in contrast with that pallid fac —as much as his friend Rossetti might have wishe to display a like splendour with the strokes of hi brush:

> Hair such a wonder of flix and floss,
> Freshness and fragrance—floods of it too!
> Gold, did I say? Nay, gold's mere dross.

The story, which might gratify a cynical observe of human nature, is treated by Browning without touch of cynicism, except that ascribed to the priest— good easy man—who has lost a soul and gained a altar. A saint *manqué*, whose legend is gruesom enough, but more pathetic than gruesome, becomes fo the poet an involuntary witness of the Christian faith and a type of the mystery of moral evil; but th

sychological contrasts of the ambiguous creature, aint-sinner, and the visual contrast of

> that face, like a silver wedge
> 'Mid the yellow wealth,

re of more worth than the sermon which the writer reaches in exposition of his tale. Had the form of he poem been Browning's favourite dramatic mono-ogue, we can imagine that an ingenious apologia, onvincing at least to Half-Pornic, could have been ffered for the perversity of the dying girl's rifting very golden tress with gold.

No poem in the volume of *Dramatis Personæ* is onnected with pictorial art, unless it be the few lines ntitled *A Face*, lines of which Emily Patmore, the oet's wife, was the subject, and written, as Browning eldom wrote, for the mere record of beauty. That little head of hers" is transferred to Browning's anel in the manner of an early Tuscan piece of ideal oveliness; in purity of outline and of colour the elicate profile, the opening lips, the neck, the chin so aturally ally themselves to painting that nature is est comprehended through its imaginative transfer-nce to art. As *Master Hugues* of the earlier collec-ion of poems converts a bewildering technique of nusic into poetry, and discovers in its intricate con-truction a certain interposing web spun by the brain etween the soul and things divine, so *Abt Vogler* nterprets music on the other side—that of immediate nspiration, to which the constructive element—real hough slight—is subordinate. In the silence and acuity which follow the impromptu on his orchestrion, he composer yearns, broods, aspires. Never were a

ghostly troop of sounds reanimated and incarnated into industrious life more actually than by Browning's verse. They climb and crowd, they mount and march, and then pass away; but the musician's spirit is borne onward by the wind of his own mood, and it cannot stay its flight until it has found rest in God; all that was actual of harmonious sound has collapsed; but the sense of a mystery of divine suggestion abides in his heart; the partial beauty becomes a pledge of beauty in its plenitude; and then by a gentle return upon himself he resumes the life of every day, sobered, quieted and comforted. The poem touches the borderland where art and religion meet. The *Toccata of Galuppi* left behind as its relics the melancholy of mundane pleasure and a sense of its transitory existence. The extemporising of *Abt Vogler* fills the void which it has opened with the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.

Faith, victor over loss, in *Abt Vogler*, is victor over temporal decay in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. The poem is the song of triumph of devout old age. Neither the shrunken sadness of Matthew Arnold's poem on old age, nor the wise moderation and acquiescence in the economy of force which an admirable poem by Emerson expresses, can be found here; and perhaps some stress and strain may be felt in Browning's effort to maintain his position. It is no "vale of years" of which *Rabbi Ben Ezra* tells; old age is viewed as an apex, a pinnacle, from which in thin translucent air all the efforts and all the errors of the past can be reviewed; the gifts of youth, the gifts of the flesh are not depreciated; but the highest attainment is that of knowledge won by experience—knowledge which

an divide good from evil and what is true from what erely seems, knowledge which can put a just valuaon not only on deeds but on every faint desire and naccomplished purpose, and not only on achieveents but failures. Possessed of such knowledge, ied in the probation of life and not found wanting, ccepting its own peculiar trials, old age can enter nto the rest of a clear and solemn vision, confident f being qualified at last to start forth upon that adventure brave and new" to which death is a ummons, and assured through experience that the ower which gives our life its law is equalled by a uperintending love. Ardour, and not lethargy, proress and not decline, are here represented as the haracteristics of extreme old age. An enthusiasm f effort and of strenuous endurance, an enthusiasm f rest in knowledge, an enthusiasm of self-abanonment to God and the divine purpose make p the poem. At no time did Browning write erse which soars with a more steadfast and imassioned libration of wing. Death in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* is death as a friend. In the lines entitled *Prospice* it is death the adversary that is confronted nd conquered; the poem is an act of the faith which omes through love; it is ascribed to no imaginary peaker, and does not, indeed, veil its personal charcter. No lonely adventure is here to reward the ictor over death; the transcendent joy is human ove recovered, which being once recovered, let whatver God may please succeed. The verses are a onfession which gives the reason of that gallant eating up against the wind, noticeable in many of Browning's later poems. He could not cease from

hope; but hope and faith had much to encounter and sometimes he would reduce the grounds of his hope to the lowest, as if to make sure against illusion and to test the fortitude of hope even at its weakest. The hope of immortality which was his own inevitably extended itself beyond himself, and became an interpreter of the mysteries of our earthly life. In contrast with the ardent ideality of *Rabbi Ben Ezra* may be set the uncompromising realism of *Apparent Failure*, with its poetry of the Paris morgue. The lover of life will scrutinise death at its ugliest and worst, blinking no hideous fact. Yet, even so, the reverence for humanity—

> Poor men, God made, and all for that!—

is not quenched, nor is the hope quenched that

> After Last returns the First,
> Though a wide compass round be fetched,
> That what began best, can't end worst.

The optimism is unreasoned, and rightly so, for the spirit of the poem, with its suggestive title, is not argumentative. The sense of "the pity of it" in one heart, remorse which has somehow come into existence out of the obscure storehouse of nature, or out of God, is the only justification suggested for a hope that nature or God must at the last intend good and not evil to the poor defeated abjects, who most abhorred their lives in Paris yesterday. And the word "Nature" here would be rejected by Browning as less than the truth.

In 1864 under somewhat altered conditions, and from a ground somewhat shifted, Browning in *A Death in the Desert* and the *Epilogue* to "Dramatis Personæ" continued his apology for the Christian

faith. The apologetics are, however, in the first instance poems, and they remain poems at the last. The imaginary scene of the death of the Evangelist John is rendered with the finest art; its dignity is that of a certain noble bareness; in the dim-lighted grotto are the aged disciple and the little group of witnesses to whom he utters his legacy of words; at the cave's edge is the Bactrian crying from time to time his bird-like cry of assurance:

Outside was all noon and the burning blue.

The slow return of the dying man to consciousness of his surroundings is as true as if it were studied from a death-bed; his sudden awakening at the words "I am the Resurrection and the Life" arrives not as a dramatic surprise but as the simplest surprise of nature—light breaking forth before sunset. The chief speaker of the poem is chosen because the argument is one concerning faith that comes through love, and St John was the disciple who had learnt love's deepest secrets. The dialectic proceeds along large lines, which have only the subtlety of simplicity. The verse moves gravely, tenderly, often weighted with monosyllables; a pondering, dwelling verse; and great single lines arise so naturally that while they fill the mind with a peculiar power, they are felt to be of one texture with the whole: this, for example,—

We would not lose
The last of what might happen on his face;

and this:—

When there was mid sea and the mighty things;

and this:—

Lie bare to the universal prick of light;

and these :—

> The Bactrian was but a wild childish man,
> And could not write nor speak, but only loved.

Such lines, however, are made to be read *in situ*.

The faith of these latter days is the same as that of the first century, and is not the same. The story and the teaching of Christ had alike one end—to plant in the human consciousness the assurance of Divine Love, and to make us, in our degree, conscious partakers of that love. Where love is, there is Christ. Our conceptions of God are relative to our own understanding; but God as power, God as a communicating intelligence, God as love—Father, Son and Spirit—is the utmost that we can conceive of things above us. Let us now put that knowledge—imperfect though it may be—to use. Power, intelligence, love—these surround us everywhere; they are not mere projections from our own brain or hand or heart; and by us they are inconceivable otherwise than as personal attributes. The historical story of Christ is not lost, for it has grown into a larger assurance of faith. We are not concerned with the linen clothes and napkins of the empty sepulchre; Christ is arisen. Why revert to discuss miracles? The work of miracles—whatever they may have been—was long ago accomplished. The knowledge of the Divine Love, its appropriation by our own hearts, and the putting forth of that love in our lives—such for us is the Christian faith, such is the work of Christ accomplishing itself in humanity at the present time. And the Christian story is no myth but a reality, not because we can prove true the beliefs of the first century, but because those beliefs contained

ithin them a larger and more enduring belief. The corn has not perished because it has expanded into n oak.

This, reduced here to the baldest statement, is in ubstance the dying testimony of Browning's St John. : is thrown into lyrical form as his own testimony the *Epilogue* to the volume of 1864. The voices f singers, the sound of the trumpets of the Jewish edication Day, when the glory of the Lord in His oud filled His house, have fallen silent. We are ld by some that the divine Face, known to early hristian days as love, has withdrawn from earth for ver, and left humanity enthroned as its sole repre-ntative:

> Oh, dread succession to a dizzy post,
> Sad sway of sceptre whose mere touch appals.

Browning's reply is that to one whose eyes are ghtly informed the whole of nature and of human e shows itself as a perpetual mystery of providential ire:

> Why, where's the need of Temple, when the walls
> O' the world are that? What use of swells and falls
> From Levites' choir, Priests' cries, and trumpet calls?
>
> That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
> Or decomposes but to recompose,
> Become my universe that feels and knows.[1]

the great poem of 1868-69, *The Ring and the ook*, one speaker, the venerable Pope, like St John of

[1] Compare with *Epilogue: Third Speaker* the lines from *A Death in e Desert*:

> Then stand before that fact, that Life and Death,
> Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, dispread,
> As though a star should open out, all sides,
> Grow the world on you, as it is my world.

A Death in the Desert, has almost reached the term o a long life: he is absorbed in the solemn weighing o truth and falsehood, good and evil; his soul, like th soul of the dying Evangelist,

> Lies bare to the universal prick of light.

He, if any of the speakers in that sequence of mono logues, expresses Browning's own highest thought And the Pope's exposition of the Christianity of ou modern age is identical with that of John. Man's mind is but "a convex glass" in which is represented all that by us can be conceived of God, "our known unknown." The Pope has heard the Christian story which is abroad in the world; he loves it and finds i credible. God's power—that is clearly discernible in the universe; His intelligence—that is no less evidently present. What of love? The dread machinery of sin and sorrow on this globe of ours seems to negative the idea of divine love. The surmise of immortality may indeed justify the ways of God to man; this "dread machinery" may be needed to evolve man's highest moral qualities. The acknowledgment of God in Christ, the divine self-sacrifice of love, for the Pope as for St John, solves

> All questions in the earth and out of it.

But whether the truth of the early centuries be an absolute historic fact,

> Or only truth reverberate, changed, made pass
> A spectrum into mind, the narrow eye—
> The same and not the same, else unconceived—

the Pope dare not affirm. Nor does he regard the question as of urgent importance at the present day

he effect of the Christian tale—historic fact, or higher act expressed in myth—remains :

> So my heart be struck,
> What care I,—by God's gloved hand or the bare?

By some means, means divinely chosen even if but a child's fable-book, we have got our truth, and it suffices or our training here on earth. Let us give over the end-ess task of unproving and re-proving the already proved ; ather let us straightway put our truth to its proper uses.[1]

If the grotesque occupies a comparatively small place in *Dramatis Personæ*, the example given is of capital importance in this province of Browning's art. The devil of Notre Dame, looking down on Paris, is more effectively placed, but is hardly a more impressive invention of Gothic fantasy than Caliban sprawling in he pit's much mire,

> With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin,

while he discourses, with a half-developed consciousness, itself in the mire and scarcely yet pawing to get free, concerning the nature of his Creator. The grotesque here is not merely of the kind that addresses he eye ; the poem is an experiment in the grotesque of thought ; and yet fantastic as it seems, the whole process of this monstrous Bridgewater treatise is governed by a certain logic. The poem, indeed, is

[1] Statements by Mrs Orr with respect to Browning's relations to Christianity will be found on p. 319 and p. 373 of her Life of Browning. She egarded "La Saisiaz" as conclusive proof of his "heterodox attitude." Robert Buchanan, in the Epistle dedicatory to "The Outcast," alleges hat he questioned Browning as to whether he were a Christian, and that Browning "thundered No!" The statement embodied in my text above substantially not mine but Browning's own. See on *Ferishtah's Fancies* n chapter xvi.

essentially a fragment of Browning's own Christian apologetics; it stands as a burly gate-tower from which boiling pitch can be flung upon the heads of assailants. The poet's intention is not at all to give us a chapter in the origins of religion; nor is Caliban a representative of primitive man. A frequently recurring idea with Browning is that expressed by Pope Innocent in the passage already cited; the external world proves the power of God; it proves His intelligence: but the proof of love is derived exclusively from the love that lives in the heart of man. Are you dissatisfied with such a proof? Well, then, see what a god we can construct out of intelligence and power, with love left out! If this world is not a place of trial and training appointed by love, then it is a scene of capricious cruelty or capricious indifference on the part of our Maker; His providence is a wanton sporting with our weakness and our misery. Why were we brought into being? To amuse His solitary and weary intelligence, and to become the victims or the indulged manifestations of His power. Why is one man selected for extreme agony from which a score of his fellows escape? Because god Setebos resembles Caliban, when through mere caprice he lets twenty crabs march past him unhurt and stones the twenty-first,

> Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.

If any of the phenomena of nature lead us to infer or imagine some law superior to the idle artistry and reckless will of Setebos, that law is surely very far away; it is "the Quiet" of Caliban's theology which takes no heed of human life and has for its outposts the cold unmoving stars.

Except the short piece named *May and Death*, which like Rossetti's poem of the wood-spurge, is founded upon one of those freaks of association that make some trival object the special remembrancer of sorrow, the remaining poems of *Dramatis Personæ*, as originally published, are all poems of love. *A Likeness*, skilfully contrived in the indirect directness of its acknowledgment of love, its jealous privacy of passion, and its irresistible delight in the homage rendered by one who is not a lover, is no exception. Not one of these poems tells of the full assurance and abiding happiness of lovers. But the warmth and sweetness of early passion are alive under the most disastrous circumstances in *Confessions*. The apothecary with his bottles provides a chart of the scene of the boy-and-girl adventures; the professional gravities of the parson put an edge on the memory of the dear indiscretions; "summer's distillation," to borrow a word from Shakespeare, makes faint the odour of the bottle labelled "Ether"; the mummy wheat from the coffin of old desire sprouts up and waves its green pennons. *Youth and Art* may be placed beside the earlier *Respectability* as two pages out of the history of the encounters of prudence and passion; youth and maiden alike, boy-sculptor and girl-singer, prefer the prudence of worldly success to the infinite prudence of love; and they have their reward—that success in life which is failure. Like the tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and Thisbe, this is a poem of "very tragical mirth." And no less tragically mirthful is *Dîs Aliter Visum*, a variation on the same or a kindred theme, where our young Bohemian sculptor is replaced by the elderly poet,

bent, wigged, and lamed, but sure of the fortieth chair in the Academy, and the lone she-sparrow on the house-top by a young beauty, who adds to her other attractions a vague, uninstructed yearning for culture and entirely substantial possessions in the three-per-cents. But the moral is the same—the folly of being overwise, the wisdom of acting upon the best promptings of the heart. In *Too Late* Browning attempts to render a mood of passionate despair—love and the hopes of love are defeated by a woman's sentence of rejection, her marriage, and, last, her death; it reads, more than any other poem of the writer, like a leaf torn out of "Wuthering Heights." There is a fixity of grief which is more appalling than this whirlblast; the souls that are wedged in ice occupy a lower circle in the region of sorrow than those which are driven before the gale. *The Worst of it*—another poem of the failures of love—reverses the conventional attitude of the wronged husband; he ought, according to all recognised authorities of drama and novel, to rage against his faithless wife, and commiserate his virtuous self; here he endeavours, though vainly, to transfer every stain and shame to himself from her; his anguish is all on her behalf, or if on his own chiefly because he cannot restore her purity or save her from her wrong done against herself. It is a poem of moral stress and strain, imagined with great intensity. Browning in general isolates a single moment or mood of passion and studies it, with its shifting lights and shadows, as a living microcosm; often it is a moment of crisis, a moment of culmination. For once in *James Lee's Wife* (named in the first edition by a stroke of pen

versity *James Lee*), he represents in a sequence of lyrics a sequence of moods, and with singular success. The season of the year is autumn, and autumn as felt not among golden wheatfields, but on a barren and rocky sea-coast; the processes of the declining year, from the first touch of change to bareness everywhere, accompany and accord with those of the decline of hope in the wife's heart for any return of her love. Her offence is that she has loved too well; that she has laid upon her husband too great a load of devotion; hostility might be met and vanquished; but how can she deal with a heart which love itself only petrifies? It should be a warning to critics who translate dramatic poems into imaginary biography to find that Browning, who had known so perfect a success in the one love of his life, should constantly present in work of imagination the ill fortunes of love and lovers. Looking a little below the surface we see that he could not write directly, he could not speak effusively, of the joy that he had known. But in all these poems he thinks of love as a supreme possession in itself and as a revelation of infinite things which lie beyond it; as a test of character, and even as a pledge of perpetual advance in the life of the spirit.

Chapter XII

The Ring and the Book

THE publication of *Dramatis Personæ* marks an advance in Browning's growing popularity; a second edition, in which some improvements were effected, was called for in 1864, the year of its first publication. "All my new cultivators," Browning wrote, "are young men"; many of them belonged to Oxford and Cambridge. But he was resolved to consult his own taste, to take his own way, and let popularity delay or hasten as it would—"pleasing myself," he says, "or aiming at doing so, and thereby, I hope, pleasing God." His life had ordered itself as seemed best to him—a life in London during the months in which the tide flows and sparkles; then summer and autumn quietude in some retreat upon the French coast. The years passed in such a uniformity of work and rest, with enjoyment accompanying each of these, that they may almost be grasped in bundles. In 1865, the holiday was again at Sainte-Marie, and the weather was golden; but he noticed with regret that the old church at Pornic, where the beautiful white girl of his poem had been buried, was disappearing to give space in front of a new and smart erection of brick and stucco. His Florence, as he learnt, was also altering, and he lamented the change. Every detail of the Italian days lived in his memory; the

violets and ground ivy on a certain old wall; the fig tree behind the Siena villa, under which his wife would sit and read, and "poor old Landor's oak." "I never hear of any one going to Florence," he wrote in 1870, "but my heart is twitched." He would like to "glide for a long summer-day through the streets and between the old stone-walls—unseen come and unheard go." But he must guard himself against being overwhelmed by recollection: "Oh, me! to find myself some late sunshiny Sunday afternoon, with my face turned to Florence—'ten minutes to the gate, ten minutes *come!*' I think I should fairly end it all on the spot."[1]

Other changes sadder than the loss of old Norman pillars and ornaments, or new barbarous structures, run up beside Poggio, were happening. In May 1866 Browning's father, kind and cheery old man, was unwell; in June Miss Browning telegraphed for her brother, and he arrived in Paris twenty-four hours before the end. The elder Browning had almost completed his eighty-fifth year. To the last he retained what his son described as "his own strange sweetness of soul." It was the close of a useful, unworldly, unambitious life, full of innocent enjoyment and deep affection. The occasion was not one for intemperate grief, but the sense of loss was great. Miss Browning, whose devotion during many years first to her mother, then to her widowed father, had been entire, now became her brother's constant companion. They rested for the summer at Le Croisic, a little town in Brittany, in a delightfully spacious old house, with the sea to right and left,

[1] Letter to Miss Blagden, Feb. 24, 1870, given by Mrs Orr, p. 287.

through whose great rushing waves Browning loved to battle, and, inland, a wild country, picturesque with its flap-hatted, white-clad, baggy-breeched villagers. Their enjoyment was unspoilt even by some weeks of disagreeable weather, and to the same place, which Browning has described in his *Two Poets of Croisic*—

> Croisic, the spit of sandy rock which juts
> Spitefully north,

they returned in the following summer. During this second visit (September 1867) that most spirited ballad of French heroism, *Hervé Riel*, was written, though its publication belongs to four years later.[1]

In June 1868 came grief of a kind that seemed to cut him off from outward communication with a portion of what was most precious in his past life. Arabel Barrett, his wife's only surviving sister, who had supported him in his greatest sorrow, died in Browning's arms. "For many years," we are told by Mr Gosse, "he was careful never to pass her house in Delamere Terrace." Although not prone to superstition, he had noted in July 1863 a dream of Miss Barrett in which she imagined herself asking her dead sister Elizabeth, "When shall I be with you?" and received the answer, "Dearest, in five years." "Only a coincidence," he adds in a letter to Miss Blagden, "but noticeable." That summer, after wanderings in France, Browning and his sister settled at Audierne on the extreme westerly point of Brittany, "a delightful, quite unspoiled little fishing town," with the ocean in front and green lanes and hills behind. It was in

[1] Vivid descriptions of Le Croisic at an earlier date may be found in one of Balzac's short stories.

very way an eventful year. In the autumn his new ublishers, Smith, Elder & Co., produced the six-olume edition of his Poetical Works, on the title-page f which the author describes himself as "Robert Browning, M.A., Honorary Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford." The distinction, partly due to Jowett's nfluence, had been conferred a year previously. In 865, Browning, who desired that his son should be ducated at Oxford, first became acquainted with owett. Acquaintance quickly ripened into friendship, hich was not the less genuine or cordial because Jowett ad but a qualified esteem for Browning's poems. Ought one to admire one's friend's poetry?" was a ifficult question of casuistry which the Master of alliol at one time proposed. Much of Browning's ork appeared to him to be "extravagant, perverse, opsy-turvy"; "there is no rest in him," Jowett wrote ith special reference to the poems "Christmas Eve" nd "Easter Day," which he regarded as Browning's oblest work. But for the man his admiration was eep-based and substantial. After Browning's first isit to him in June 1865, Jowett wrote that though etting too old to make, as he supposed, new friends, e had—he believed—made one. "It is impossible to peak without enthusiasm of Mr Browning's open, enerous nature and his great ability and knowledge. had no idea that there was a perfectly sensible poet n the world, entirely free from vanity, jealousy, or ny other littleness, and thinking no more of himself han any ordinary man. His great energy is very emarkable, and his determination to make the most f the remainder of life. Of personal objects he eems to have none except the education of his

son."[1] Browning's visits to Oxford and Cambridge di not cease when he dropped away from the round of visit ing at country houses. He writes with frank enjoy ment of the almost interminable banquet given a Balliol in the Lent Term, 1877, on the occasion c the opening of the new Hall. Oxford conferred upo him her D.C.L. in 1882, on which occasion a happ undergraduate jester sent fluttering towards the ne Doctor's head an appropriate allusion in the form of red cotton night-cap. The Cambridge LL.D. wa conferred in 1879. In 1871 he was elected a Lif Governor of the University of London. In 1868 h was invited to stand, with the certainty of electio for the Lord Rectorship of the University of S Andrews, as successor to John Stuart Mill, an honou which he declined.[2] The great event of this year i the history of his authorship was the publication i November and December of the first two volumes c *The Ring and the Book*. The two remaining volume followed in January and February 1869.

In June 1859 Browning lighted, among the litte of odds and ends exposed for sale in the Piazza Sa Lorenzo, Florence, upon the "square old yellow book part print, part manuscript, which contained the crud fact from which his poem of the Franceschini murde case was developed. The price was a lira, "eigh pence English just." As he leaned by the fountai and walked through street and street, he read, an had mastered the contents before his foot was on th

[1] *Life of Jowett* by Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, i. 400, 401.

[2] A repeated invitation in 1877 was also declined. In 1875 Browning w nominated by the Independent Club to the office of Lord Rector Glasgow University.

hreshold of Casa Guidi.[1] That night his brain was
-work; pacing the terrace of Casa Guidi, while from
elice church opposite came

> the clear voice of the cloistered ones,
> Chanting a chant made for mid-summer nights,

e gave himself up to the excitement of re-creating
ne actors and re-enacting their deeds in his
nagination:

> I fused my live soul and that inert stuff,
> Before attempting smithcraft.

According to Mr Rudolf Lehmann, but possibly he
as antedated the incident, Browning at once conceived
ne mode in which the subject could be treated in
oetry, and it was precisely the mode which was
fterwards adopted: "'When I had read the book,' so
rowning told me, 'my plan was at once settled. I
ent for a walk, gathered twelve pebbles from the
oad, and put them at equal distances on the parapet
nat bordered it. Those represented the twelve
hapters into which the poem is divided, and I adhered
o that arrangement to the last.'"[2] When in the autumn
e journeyed with his wife to Rome, the vellum-bound
uarto was with him, but the persons from whom he
ought further light about the murder and the trial
ould give little information or none. Smithcraft did
ot soon begin. He offered the story, "for prose
eatment" to Miss Ogle, so we are informed by Mrs

[1] Such a book would naturally attract Browning, who, like his father, ad an interest in celebrated criminal cases. In his *Memories* (p. 338), egan Paul records his surprise at a dinner-party where the conversation rned on murder, to find Browning acquainted "to the minutest detail" ith every *cause célèbre* of that kind within living memory.

[2] *An Artist's Reminiscences*, by R. Lehmann (1894), p. 224.

Orr, and, she adds, but with less assurance of state ment, offered it "for poetic use to one of his leadin contemporaries." We have seen that in a letter c 1862 from Biarritz, Browning speaks of the Roma murder case as being the subject of a new poer already clearly conceived though unwritten. In th last section of *The Ring and the Book*, he refers t having been in close converse with his old quarto c the Piazza San Lorenzo during four years:

> How will it be, my four-years' intimate,
> When thou and I part company anon?

The publication of *Dramatis Personæ* in 186 doubtless enabled Browning to give undivided atten tion to his vast design. In October of that year h advanced to actual definition of his scheme. Whe staying in the south of France he visited the mountai gorge which is connected with the adventure of th Roland of romance, and there he planned the whol poem precisely as it was carried out. "He says," M W. M. Rossetti enters in his diary after a conversatio with Browning (15 March 1868), "he writes day b day on a regular systematic plan—some three hour in the early part of the day; he seldom or neve unless in quite brief poems, feels the inspiring impuls and sets the thing down into words at the same tim —often stores up a subject long before he writes i He has written his forthcoming work all consecutivel —not some of the later parts before the earlier."[1]

When Carlyle met Browning after the appearanc of *The Ring and the Book*, he desired to be compl mentary, but was hardly more felicitous than Brownin

[1] Rossetti Papers, p. 302.

imself had sometimes been when under a like ecessity: "It is a wonderful book," declared Carlyle, one of the most wonderful poems ever written. I e-read it all through—all made out of an Old Bailey ory that might have been told in ten lines, and only ants forgetting."[1] A like remark might have been ade respecting the book which, in its method and its nge of all English books most resembles Browning's em, and which may indeed be said to take among ose works of fiction a similar place to that held ong poetical creations by Browning's tale of Guido nd Pompilia. Richardson's *Clarissa* consists of eight olumes made out of an Old Bailey story, or what ight have been such, which one short newspaper aragraph could have dismissed to a happy or sorrowful blivion. But then we should never have known two the most impressive figures invented by the imagination of man, Clarissa and her wronger; and had we not eard their story from all the participators and told ith Richardson's characteristic interest in the microcopy of the human heart, it could never have possessed ur minds with that full sense of its reality which is the xperience of every reader. (Out of the infinitesimally ttle emerges what is great; out of the transitory oments rise the forms that endure. It is of little rofit to discuss the question whether Richardson could ave effected his purpose in four volumes instead eight, or whether Browning ought to have contented imself with ten thousand lines of verse instead of venty thousand. No one probably has said of either ork that it is too short, and many have uttered the

[1] So the story was told by Dante Rossetti, as recorded by Mrs Gilchrist; e says that she believed the story was told of himself by Carlyle.

sentence of the critical Polonius—"This is too long But neither *Clarissa* nor *The Ring and the Book* one of the Hundred Merry Tales; the purpose of eac writer is triumphantly effected; and while we wis that the same effect could have been produced b means less elaborate, it is not safe to assert confidentl that this was possible.

It has often been said that the story is told te times over by almost as many speakers; it would b more correct to say that the story is not told eve once. Nine different speakers tell nine different stories stories of varying incidents about different persons— for the Pompilia of Guido and the Pompilia c Caponsacchi are as remote, each from other, as marsh-fire from a star, and so with the rest. In th end we are left to invent the story for ourselves—nc indeed without sufficient guidance towards the trut of things, since the successive speeches are a discip line in distinguishing the several values of huma testimony. We become familiar with idols of th cave, idols of the tribe, idols of the market-place, an shall recognise them if we meet them again. Gossipr on this side is checked and controlled by gossipry o that; and the nicely balanced indifferentism of me emasculate, blank of belief, who play with the realitie of life, is set forth with its superior foolishness c wisdom. The advocacy which consists of professiona self-display is exhibited genially, humorously, a advocacy horn-eyed to the truth of its own case, t every truth, indeed, save one—that which commend the advocate himself, his ingenious wit, and his flowe of rhetoric. The criminal is allowed his due portio of veracity and his fragment of truth—"What sha

man give for his life?" He has enough truth
o enable him to fold a cloud across the light, to
rrench away the sign-posts and reverse their pointing
ands, to remove the land-marks, to set up false signal
res upon the rocks. And then are heard three
uccessive voices, each of which, and each in a different
ray, brings to our mind the words, "But there is a
pirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty
iveth them understanding." First the voice of the
ure passion of manhood, which is naked and un-
shamed; a voice terrible in its sincerity, absolute in
s abandonment to truth, prophet-like in its carelessness
f personal consequences, its carelessness of all except
ne deliverance of a message—and yet withal a courtly
oice, and, if it please, ironical. It is as if Elihu the
on of Barachel stood up and his wrath were kindled:
Behold my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it
s ready to burst like new bottles. I will speak that
may be refreshed." And yet we dare not say that
Caponsacchi's truth is the whole truth; he speaks like
man newly converted, still astonished by the super-
atural light, and inaccessible to many things visible
n the light of common day. Next, a voice from one
who is human indeed "to the red-ripe of the heart,"
ut who is already withdrawn from all the turbulence
nd turbidity of life; the voice of a woman who is
till a child; of a mother who is still virginal; of
rimitive instinct, which comes from God, and spiritual
esire kindled by that saintly knighthood that had
aved her; a voice from the edge of the world, where
ne dawn of another world has begun to tremble and
row luminous,—uttering its fragment of the truth.
Last, the voice of old age, and authority and matured

experience, and divine illumination, old age encom passed by much doubt and weariness and human in firmity, a solemn, pondering voice, which, with Goc somewhere in the clear-obscure, goes sounding on a dim and perilous way, until in a moment this voice o the anxious explorer for truth changes to the voice of the unalterable justicer, the armed doomsman o righteousness.

Truth absolute is not attained by any one of the speakers; that, Browning would say, is the concern o God. And so, at the close, we are directed to take to heart the lesson

> That our human speech is naught,
> Our human testimony false, our fame
> And human estimation words and wind.

But there are degrees of approximation to truth and of remoteness from it. Truth as apprehended by pure passion, truth as apprehended by simplicity of sou ("And a little child shall lead them"), truth as appre hended by spiritual experience—such respectively make up the substance of the monologues of Caponsacchi of Pompilia, and of the Pope. For the valuation however, of this loftier testimony we require a sense of the level ground, even if it be the fen-country A perception of the heights must be given by ex hibiting the plain. If we were carried up in the ai and heard these voices how should we know fo certain that we had not become inhabitants of some Cloudcuckootown? And the plain is where we ordin arily live and move; it has its rights, and is worth understanding for its own sake. Therefore we shal mix our mind with that of "Half-Rome" and "The Other Half-Rome" before we climb any mounts o

ransfiguration or enter any city set upon a hill. The "man in the street" is a veritable person, and it is good that we should make his acquaintance; even the man in the *salon* may speak his mind if he will; such shallow excitements, such idle curiosities as theirs will enable us better to appreciate the upheaval to the depths in the heart of Caponsacchi, the quietude, and the rapt joy in quietude, of Pompilia, the profound searchings of spirit that proceed all through the droop of that sombre February day in the closet of the Pope. And, then, at the most tragic moment and when pathos is most poignant, life goes on, and the world is wide, and laughter is not banished from earth. Therefore Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis, Procurator of the Poor, shall make his ingenious notes for the defence of Count Guido, and cite his precedents and quote his authorities, and darken counsel with words, all to be by and by ecclesiasticized and regularized and Latinized and Ciceroized, while more than half the good man's mind is occupied with thought of the imminent "lovesome frolic feast" on his boy Cinone's birth-night, which shall bring with it lamb's fry and liver, stung out of its monotony of richness by parsley-sprigs and fennel. Yes, and we shall hear also the other side—how, in a florilegium of Latin, selected to honour aright the Graces and the Muses and the majesty of Law, Johannes-Baptista Bottinius can do justice to his client and to his own genius by showing, with due exordium and argument and peroration, that Pompilia is all that her worst adversaries allege, and yet can be established innocent, or not so very guilty, by her rhetorician's learning and legal deftness in quart and tierce.

The secondary personages in Richardson's "Clarissa" grow somewhat faint in our memories; but the figures of his heroine and of Lovelace remain not only uneffaceable but undimmed by time. Four of the *dramatis personæ* of Browning's poem in like manner possess an enduring life, which shows no decline or abatement after the effect of the monologues by the other speakers has been produced and the speakers themselves almost forgotten. Count Guido Franceschini is not a miracle of evil rendered credible, like Shakespeare's Iago, nor a strange enormity of tyrannous hate and lust like the Count Cenci of Shelley. He has no spirit of diabolic revelry in crime; no feeling for its delicate artistry; he is under no spell of fascination derived from its horror. He is clumsy in his fraud and coarse in his violence. Sin may have its strangeness in beauty; but Guido does not gleam with the romance of sin. If Browning once or twice gives his fantasy play, it is in describing the black cave of a palace at Arezzo into which the white Pompilia is borne, the cave and its denizens—the "gaunt gray nightmare" of a mother, mopping and mowing in the dusk, the brothers, "two obscure goblin creatures, fox-faced this, cat-clawed the other," with Guido himself as the main monster. Yet the Count short of stature, "hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard" is not a monster but a man; possessed of intellectual ability and a certain grace of bearing when occasion requires; although wrenched and enfeebled by the torture of the rack he holds his ground, has even a little irony to spare, and makes a skilful defence. Browning does not need a lithe, beautiful, mysterious human panther, and is content with a plain, prosaic

erviceable villain, who would have been disdained y the genius of the dramatist Webster as wanting n romance. But like some of Webster's saturnine, ntastic assistants or tools in crime, Guido has failed n everything, is no longer young, chews upon the itter root of failure, and is half-poisoned by its acrid ices. He is godless in an age of godless living; ynical in a cynical generation; and ever and anon e betrays the licentious imagination of an age of cense. He plays a poor part in the cruel farce of fe, and snarls against the world, while clinging esperately to the world and to life. A disinterested yalty to the powers of evil might display a certain allantry of its own, but, though Guido loathes good-ess, his devotion to evil has no inverted chivalry in —there is always a valid reason, a sordid motive r his rage. And in truth he has grounds of com-laint, which a wave of generous passion would have vept away, but which, following upon the ill successes his life, might well make a bad man mad. His ife, palmed off upon the representative of an ancient nd noble house, is the child of a nameless father and common harlot of Rome; she is repelled by his erson; and her cold submission to what she has een instructed in by the Archbishop as the duties a wife is more intolerable than her earlier remoter version. He is cheated of the dowry which lured m to marriage. He is pointed at with smiling scorn y the gossips of Arezzo. A gallant of the troop of atan might have devised and executed some splendid evenge; but Guido is ever among the sutlers and mp-followers of the fiend, who are base before they e bold. When he makes his final pleading for life

in the cell of the New Prison by Castle Angelo, the animal cry, like that of a wild cat on whom the teeth of the trap have closed, is rendered shrill by the intensity of imagination with which he pictures to himself the apparatus of the scaffold and the hideous circumstance of his death. His effort, as far as it is rational, is to transfer the guilt of his deeds to anyone or everyone but himself. When all other resources fail he boldly lays the offence upon God, who has made him what he is. It was a fine audacity of Browning in imagining the last desperate shriek of the wretched man, uttered as the black-hatted Brotherhood of Death descend the stairs singing their accursed psalm, to carry the climax of appeal to the powers of charity, "Christ,—Maria,—God," one degree farther, and make the murderer last of all cry upon his victim to be his saviour from the death which he dares to name by the name of his own crime, a name which that crime might seem to have sequestered from all other uses :—

"Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"

Pompilia is conceived by Browning not as a pale passive victim, but as strong with a vivid, interior life, and not more perfect in patience than in her obedience to the higher law which summons her to resistance to evil and championship of the right. Her purity is not the purity of ice but of fire. When the Pope would find for himself a symbol to body forth her soul, it is not a lily that he thinks of but a rose. Others may yield to the eye of God a "timid leaf" and an "uncertain bud,"

> While—see how this mere chance sown, cleft-nursed seed
> That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot
> Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,

Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
To incorporate the whole great sun it loves
From the inch-height whence it looks and longs. My flower,
My rose, I gather for the breast of God.

s she lies on her pallet, dying "in the good house
at helps the poor to die," she is far withdrawn from
e things of time; her life, with all its pleasures and
s pains, seems strange and far away—

Looks old, fantastic and impossible:
I touch a fairy thing that fades and fades.

Two possessions, out of what life has brought, main with her—the babe, who while yet unborn ad converted her from a sufferer to a defender, and e friend who has saved her soul. Even motherhood self is not the deepest thing in Pompilia's nature. he little Gaetano, whom she had held in her arms r three days, will change; he will grow great, strong, ern, a tall young man, who cannot guess what she as like, who may some day have some hard thought her. He too withdraws into the dream of earth. he can never lose him, and yet lose him she surely ust; all she can do is by dying to give him "out-ght to God, without a further care," so to be safe. ut one experience of Pompilia's life was quite out time, and belongs by its mere essence to eternity. aving laid her babe away with God, she must not en "think of him again, for gratitude"; and her st breath shall spend itself in doing service to earth by riving to make men know aright what earth will for a ne possess and then, forever, heaven—God's servant, an's friend, the saviour of the weak, the foe of all who e vile—and to the gossips of Arezzo and of Rome the ibble and coxcomb and light-of-love priest, Caponsacchi.

If any point in the whole long poem, *The Ring and the Book*, can be described as central, it must be found in the relations, each to the other, of Caponsacchi and Pompilia. The truth of it, as conceived by Browning, could hardly be told otherwise than in poetry, for it needs the faith that comes through spiritual beauty to render it comprehensible and credible, and such beauty is best expressed by art. It is easy to convince the world of a passion between the sexes which is simply animal; nor is art much needed to help out the proof. Happily the human love, in which body and soul play in varying degrees their parts, and each an honoured part, is in widest commonalty spread. But the love that is wholly spiritual seems to some a supernatural thing, and if it be not discredited as utterly unreal (which at certain periods, if literature be a test, has been the case), it is apt to appear as a thing phantom-like, tenuous, and cold. But, in truth, this reality once experienced makes the other realities appear the shadows, and it is an ardour as passionate as any that is known to man. Its special note is a deliverance from self with a joy in abandonment to some thing other than self, like that which has been often recorded as an experience in religious conversion; when Bunyan, for example, ceased from the efforts to establish his own righteousness and saw that righteousness above him in the eternal heavens, he walked as a man suddenly illuminated, and could hardly forbear telling his joy to the crows upon the plough-land; and so in its degree, with the spiritual exaltation produced by the love of man and woman when it touches a certain rare but real altitude. If a poet can succeed in lifting up our hearts so that they may know for actual the

ruth of these things, he has contributed an important ragment towards an interpretation of human life. nd this Browning has assuredly done. The sense f a power outside oneself whose influence invades the ast-awakened man, the conviction that the secret of fe has been revealed, the lying passive and prone to ne influx of the spirit, the illumination, the joy, the ssurance that old things have passed away and that l things have become new, the acceptance of a upreme law, the belief in a victory obtained over time nd death, the rapture in a heart prepared for all self- crifice, entire immolation—these are rendered by rowning with a fidelity which if reached solely by nagination is indeed surprising, for who can discover ese mysteries except through a personal experience?[1] the senses co-operate—as perhaps they do—in such ysteries, they are senses in a state of transfiguration, nses taken up into the spirit—"Whether in the body out of the body I cannot tell." When Caponsacchi ears the body of Pompilia in a swoon to her chamber the inn at Castelnuovo, it is as if he bore the host. rom the first moment when he set eyes upon her the theatre,

> A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad,

is delivered from his frivolous self, he is solemnized d awed; the form of his worship is self-sacrifice; s first word to her—"I am yours"—is

> An eternity
> Of speech, to match the immeasurable depth
> O' the soul that then broke silence.

[1] The passage specially referred to is in Caponsacchi's monologue, ll. -973, beginning with "Thought? nay, sirs, what shall follow was not ught."

To abstain from ever seeing her again would be joy more than pain if this were duty to her and to God. For him the mere revelation of Pompilia would suffice. His inmost feeling is summed up with perfect adequacy in a word to the Judges: "You know this is not love Sirs—it is faith."

There is another kind of faith which comes not suddenly through passion but slowly through thought and action and trial, and the long fidelity of a life. It is that of which Milton speaks in the lines:

> Till old experience do attain
> To something of Prophetic strain.

This is the faith of Browning's Pope Innocent, who up to extreme old age has kept open his intelligence both on the earthward and the Godward sides, and who being wholly delivered from self by that devotion to duty which is the habit of his mind, can apprehend the truth of things and pronounce judgment upon them almost with the certitude of an instrument of the divine righteousness. And yet he is entirely human, God's vicegerent and also an old man, learned in the secrets of the heart, patient in the inquisition of facts, weighing his documents, scrutinising each fragment of evidence, burdened by the sense of responsibility, cheered also by the opportunity of true service, grave but not sad—

> Simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute,
> With prudence, probity and—what beside
> From the other world he feels impress at times;

a "grey ultimate decrepitude," yet visited by the spiritual fire which touches a soul whose robe of flesh is worn thin; not unassailed by doubts as to

he justice of his final decision, but assured that his part is confidently to make the best use of the powers with which he has been entrusted; young of heart, if also old, in his rejoicing in goodness and his antipathy to evil.

The Ring and the Book is a great receptacle into which Browning poured, with an affluence that perhaps is excessive, all his powers—his searchings for truth, his passion, his casuistry, his feeling for beauty, his tenderness, his gift of pity, his veiled memories of what was most precious in the past, his hopes for the future, his worldly knowledge, his unworldly aspirations, his humour, such as it was, robust rather than delicate. Could the three monologues which tell how in various ways it strikes a Roman contemporary have been fused into a single dialogue, could the speeches of the two advocates have been briefly set over, one against the other, instead of being drawn out at length, we might still have got the whole of Browning's mind. But we must take things as we find them, and perhaps a skilled writer knows his own business best. Never was Browning's mastery in narrative displayed with such effect as in Caponsacchi's account of the flight to Rome, which is not mere record, but record winged with lyrical enthusiasm. Never was his tenderness so deep or poignant as in his realisation of the motherhood of Pompilia. Never were the gropings of intellect and the intuitions of the spirit shown by him in their weakness and their strength with such a lucid subtlety as in the deliberations and decisions of the Pope. The whole poem which he compares to a ring was the ring of a strong male finger; but the posy of the ring, and the comparison is again his own, tells

how it was a gift hammered and filed during the years of smithcraft "in memoriam"; in memory and also with a hope.

The British Public, whom Browning addresses at the close of his poem, and who "liked him not" during so many years, now when he was not far from sixty went over to his side. *The Ring and the Book* almost immediately passed into a second edition. The decade from 1869 onwards is called by Mrs Orr the fullest period in Browning's life. His social occupations and entertainments both in London and for a time as a visitor at country-houses became more numerous and absorbing, yet he had energy for work as well as for play. During these ten years no fewer than nine new volumes of his poetry appeared. None of them are London poems, and Italy is for the present almost forgotten; it is the scene of only two or three short pieces, which are included in the volume of 1876—*Pacchiarotto and how he worked in distemper; with other Poems.* The other pieces of the decade as regards their origin fall with a single exception into two groups; first those of ancient Greece, suggested by Browning's studies in classical drama; secondly those, which in a greater or less degree, are connected with his summer wanderings in France and Switzerland. The dream-scene of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau in Leicester Square; but this also is one of the poems of France. *The Inn Album* alone is English in its characters and their surroundings. Such a grouping of the works of the period is of a superficial nature and it can be readily dismissed. It brings into prominence, however, the fact that Browning, while resolved to work out what was in him, lay open to

asual suggestions. He had acquired certain methods which he could apply to almost any topic. He had onfidence that any subject on which he concentrated is powers of mind could be compelled to yield material of interest. It cannot be said that he exercised always a wise discretion in the choice of ubjects; these ought to have been excellent in themselves; he trusted too much to the successful issue of he play of his own intellect and imagination around and about his subjects. *The Ring and the Book* had given him practice, extending over several years, in handling the large dramatic monologue. Now he was prepared to stretch the dramatic monologue beyond the bounds, and new devices were invented o keep it from stagnating and to carry it forward. Imaginary disputants intervene in the monologue; here are objections, replies, retorts; a second player n the game not being found, the speaker has to play against himself.

In the story of the Roman murder-case fancy was mingled with fact, and truth with falsehood, with a view to making truth in the end the more salient. The poet had used to the full his dramatic right of throwing himself into intellectual sympathy with persons towards whom he stood in moral antagonism or at least experienced an inward sense of alienation. The characteristic of much of his later poetry is that it s for ever tasking falsehood to yield up truth, for ever to employ imagery of his own) as a swimmer beating he treacherous water with the feet in order that the ead may rise higher into the pure air made for the pirit's breathing. Browning's genius united an intellect which delighted in the investigation of complex

problems with a spiritual and emotional nature manifesting itself in swift and simple solutions of those problems; it united an analytic or discursive power supplied by the head with an intuitive power springing from the heart. He employed his brain to twist and tangle a Gordian knot in order that in a moment it might be cut with the sword of the spirit. In the earlier poems his spiritual ardours and intuitions were often present throughout, and without latency, without reserve; impassioned truth often flashed upon the reader through no intervening or resisting medium. In *The Ring and the Book*, and in a far greater degree in some subsequent poems, while the supreme authority resides in the spiritual intuitions or the passions of the heart, their instantaneous, decisive work waits until a prolonged casuistry has accomplished its utmost; falsehood seems almost more needful in the process of the poet than truth. And yet it is never actually so. Rather to the poet, as a moral explorer, it appeared a kind of cowardice to seek truth only where it may easily be found; the strenuous hunter will track it through all winding ways of error; it is thrown out as a spot of intense illumination upon a background of darkness; it leaps forth as the flash of the search-light piercing through a mist. The masculine characters in the poems are commonly made the exponents of Browning's intellectual casuistry — a Hohenstiel-Schwangau, an Aristophanes; and they are made to say the best and the most truthful words that can be uttered by such as they are and from such positions as theirs; the female characters, a Balaustion, the Lady of Sorrows in *The Inn Album* and others are often revealers of sudden truth, which

with them is either a divine revelation—the vision seen from a higher and clearer standpoint—or a dictate of pure human passion. Eminent moments in life had an extraordinary interest for Browning—moments when life, caught up out of the habitual ways and the lower levels of prudence, takes its guidance and inspiring motive from an immediate discovery of truth through some noble ardour of the heart. Therefore it did not seem much to him to task his ingenuity through almost all the pages of a laborious book in creating a tangle and embroilment of evil and good, of truth and falsehood, in view of the fact that a shining moment is at last to spring forward and do its work of severing absolutely and finally right from wrong, and shame from a splendour of righteousness. Browning's readers longed at times, and not without cause, for the old directness and the old pervading presence of spiritual and impassioned truth.[1]

[1] I have used here some passages already printed in my *Studies in Literature*.

Chapter XIII

Poems on Classical Subjects

DURING these years, 1869-1878, Browning's outward life maintained its accustomed ways. In the summer of 1869 he wandered with his son and his sister, in company with his friends of Italian days, the Storys, in Scotland, and at Loch Luichart Lodge visited Lady Ashburton.[1] Three summers, those of 1870, 1872 and 1873 were spent at Saint-Aubin, a wild "un-Murrayed" village on the coast of Normandy, where Milsand occupied a little cottage hard by. At night the light-house of Havre shot forth its beam, and it was with "a thrill" that Browning saw far off the spot where he had once sojourned with his wife.[2] "I don't think we were ever quite so thoroughly washed by the sea-air from all quarters as here," he wrote in August 1870. Every morning, as Mme. Blanc (Th. Bentzon) tells us, he might be seen "walking along the sands with the small Greek copy of Homer which was his constant companion. On Sunday he went with the Milsands . . . to a service held in the chapel of the Château Blagny, at Lion-sur-Mer, for the few Protestants of that region. They were generally accom-

[1] Was this a "baffled visit," as described by Mr Henry James in his "Life of Story" (ii. 197), when the hostess was absent, and the guests housed in an inn?

[2] Letter quoted by Mrs Orr, p. 288.

nied by a young Huguenot peasant, their neighbour, d Browning with the courtesy he showed to every oman, used to take a little bag from the hands of e strong Norman girl, notwithstanding her entreaties." ne visit of 1870 was saddened by the knowledge of nat France was suffering during the progress of the ar. He lingered as long as possible for the sake of mradeship with Milsand, around whose shoulder owning's arm would often lie as they walked gether on the beach.[1] But communication with ngland became daily more and more difficult. ilsand insisted that his friend should instantly turn. It is said by Mme. Blanc that Browning was tually suspected by the peasants of a neighbouring llage of being a Prussian spy. Not without difficulty : and his sister reached Honfleur, where an English ttle-boat was found preparing to start at midnight r Southampton.

Two years later Miss Thackeray was also on the ast of Normandy and at no great distance. "It was fine hot summer," she writes, "with sweetness and mpleteness everywhere; the cornfields gilt and far-retching, the waters blue, the skies arching high id clear, and the sunsets succeeding each other in ost glorious light and beauty." Some slight mis-nderstanding on Browning's part, the fruit of mischief-aking gossipry, which caused constraint between m and his old friend was cleared away by the good fices of Milsand. While Miss Thackeray sat writing, ith shutters closed against the blazing sun, Browning mself "dressed all in white, with a big white umbrella

[1] The attitude is reproduced in a photograph from which a woodcut is ven in Mme. Blanc's article "A French Friend of Browning."

under his arm," arrived to take her hand with all h old cordiality. A meeting of both with the Milsand then occupying a tiny house in a village on the out edges of Luc-sur-mer, soon followed, and before th sun had fallen that evening they were in Browning house upon the cliff at Saint-Aubin. "The sitting room door opened to the garden and the sea beyond— a fresh-swept bare floor, a table, three straw chairs, or book upon the table. Mr Browning told us it wa the only book he had with him. The bedrooms wer as bare as the sitting-room, but I remember a litt dumb piano standing in a corner, on which he used t practise in the early morning. I heard Mr Brownin declare they were perfectly satisfied with their litt house; that his brains, squeezed as dry as a spong were only ready for fresh air."[1] Perhaps Browning "only book" of 1872 contained the dramas Æschylus, for at Fontainebleau where he spent som later weeks of the year these were the special subje of his study. It was at Saint-Aubin in 1872 that h found the materials for his poem of the following yea and to Miss Thackeray's drowsy name for the distric

Symbolic of the place and people too,

White Cotton Night-Cap Country, the suggestion Browning's title *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* is du To her the poem is dedicated.

Browning's interest in those who were render homeless and destitute in France during the Prussi invasion was shown in a practical way in the spri of 1871. He had for long been averse to the public tion of his poems in magazines and reviews. In 18

[1] "Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning," by Annie Ritchie, 291, 292.

had gratified his American admirers by allowing *ld Hair* and *Prospice* to appear in the *Atlantic onthly* previous to their inclusion in *Dramatis rsonæ*. A fine sonnet written in 1870, suggested the tower erected at Clandeboye by Lord Dufferin memory of his mother, Helen, Countess of Gifford, d been inserted in some undistributed copies of a mphlet, "Helen's Tower," privately printed twenty ars previously; the sonnet was published at the se of 1883 in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, but was t given a place by Browning in the collected editions his Poetical Works. In general he felt that the scellaneous contents of a magazine, surrounding a em, formed hardly an appropriate setting for such rse as his. In February 1871, however, he offered his friend and publisher Mr Smith the ballad of *ervé Riel* for use in the *Cornhill Magazine* of March, nturing for once, as he says, to puff his wares and l the verses good. His purpose was to send some- ng to the distressed people of Paris, and one ndred guineas, the sum liberally fixed by Mr ith as the price of the poem, were duly forwarded the gift of the English poet and his Breton hero. e facts of the story had been forgotten and were nied at St Malo; the reports of the French Ad- ralty were examined and indicated the substantial curacy of the poem. On one point Browning ed; it was not a day's holiday to be spent with his e "la Belle Aurore" which the Breton sailor itioned for as the reward of his service, but a "congé solu," the holiday of a life-time. In acknowledging error to Dr Furnivall, and adding an explanation its cause, he dismissed the subject with the word,

"Truth above all things; so treat the matter as yo
please." [1]

For the purposes of holiday-making the resources
the northern French coast, with which Browning's balla
of the Croisickese pilot is associated, were, says M
Orr, becoming exhausted. Yet some rest and refresh
ment after the heavy tax upon his strength made b
a London season with its various claims were essenti
to his well-being. His passion for music would n
permit him during his residence in town to be abse
from a single important concert; the extraordina
range of his acquaintance with the works of great an
even of obscure composers was attested by Halle.
his sonnet of 1884, inscribed in the Album to M
Arthur Chappell, *The Founder of the Feast*, a poe
not included in any edition of his works, he recal
these evenings of delight:

> Sense has received the utmost Nature grants,
> My cup was filled with rapture to the brim,
> When, night by night—ah, memory, how it haunts!—
> Music was poured by perfect ministrants,
> By Halle, Schumann, Piatti, Joachim.

Long since in Florence he had become acquainte
with Miss Egerton-Smith, who loved music like hin
self, and was now often his companion at publ
performances in London. She was wealthy, and wi
too little confidence in her power to win the regard
others, she lived apart from the great world. In 187
Browning lost the warm-hearted and faithful frie
who had given him such prompt, womanly help in h
worst days of grief—Miss Blagden. Her place in h

[1] "A Bibliography of the Writings of Robert Browning," by T.
Wise, pp. 157, 158.

nemory remained her own. Miss Egerton-Smith night seem to others wanting in strength of feeling nd cordiality of manner. Browning knew the sensi- veness of her nature, which responded to the touch of ffection, and he could not fail to discover her true elf, veiled though it was by a superficial reserve. And s he knew her, so he wrote of her in the opening of is *La Saisiaz*:

ou supposed that few or none had known and loved you in the world :
lay be! flower that's full-blown tempts the butterfly, not flower that's furled.
ut more learned sense unlocked you, loosed the sheath and let expand
ud to bell and out-spread flower-shape at the least warm touch of hand
-Maybe throb of heart, beneath which,—quickening farther than it knew,—
reasure oft was disembosomed, scent all strange and unguessed hue.
isembosomed, re-embosomed,—must one memory suffice,
rove I knew an Alpine rose which all beside named Edelweiss?

Miss Egerton-Smith was the companion and house- nate of Browning and his sister in their various ummer wanderings from 1874 to 1877. In the rst of these years the three friends occupied a house acing the sea at the village of Mers near Tréport. Browning at this time was much absorbed by his *Aristophanes' Apology*. "Here," writes Mrs Orr, "with ninterrupted quiet, and in a room devoted to his se, Mr Browning would work till the afternoon was dvanced, and then set off on a long walk over the liffs, often in the face of a wind, which, as he wrote f it at the time, he could lean against as if it were a

wall." The following summers were spent at Villers in Normandy (1875), at the Isle of Arran (1876), and in the upland country of the Salève, near Geneva. During the visit to the Salève district, where Browning and his sister with Miss Egerton-Smith occupied a châlet named La Saisiaz, he was, Mrs Orr tells us, "unusually depressed and unusually disposed to regard the absence from home as a banishment." Yet the place seemed lovely to him in its solitude and its beauty; the prospect of Geneva, with lake and plain extended below, varying in appearance with the shifting of clouds, was repose to his sense of sight. He bathed twice each day in the mountain stream—"a marvel of delicate delight framed in with trees." He read and rested; and wrote but little or not at all. Suddenly the repose of La Saisiaz was broken up, the mood of languorous pleasure and drowsy discontent was at an end. While preparing to join her friend on a long-intended mountain climb Miss Egerton-Smith, with no forewarning, died. The shock was for a time overwhelming. When Browning returned to London the poem *La Saisiaz*, the record of his inquisition into the mystery of death, of his inward debate concerning a future life, was written. It was the effort of resilience in his spirit in opposition to that stroke which deprived him of the friend who was so near and dear.

The grouping of the works produced by Browning from the date of the publication of *The Ring and the Book* (1868) to the publication of *La Saisiaz* (1878), which is founded upon the occasions that suggested them, has only an external and historical interest. The studies in the Greek drama and the creations to

hich these gave rise extend at intervals over the hole decade. *Balaustion's Adventure* was published 1871, *Aristophanes' Apology* in 1875, the translation *The Agamemnon of Æschylus* in 1877. Two of the olumes of this period, *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* 871) and *Fifine at the Fair* (1872) are casuistical onologues, and these, it will be observed, lie side by de in the chronological order. The first of the pair concerned with public and political life, with the onduct and character of a man engaged in the affairs state; the second, with a domestic question, the asuistry of wedded fidelity and infidelity, from which ne scope of the poem extends itself to a wider survey human existence and its meanings.[1] Two of the olumes are narrative poems, each tending to a tragic risis; *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* (1873) is a story ntangled with questions relating to religion; *The Inn Album* (1875) is a tragedy of the passion of love. he volume of 1876, *Pacchiarotto with other Poems*, is ne miscellaneous gathering of lyrical and narrative ieces which had come into being during a period of nany years. Finally in *La Saisiaz* Browning, writing n his own person, records the experience of his spirit n confronting the problem of death. But it was part f his creed that the gladness of life may take hands ith its grief, that the poet who would live mightily nust live joyously; and in the volume which contained is poem of strenuous and virile sorrow he did not efrain from including a second piece, *The two Poets of roisic*, which has in it much matter of honest mirth, nd closes with the declaration that the test of great-

[1] *Aristophanes' Apology* is connected with these poems by its character s a casuistical self-defence of the chief speaker.

ness in an artist lies in his power of converting hi more than common sufferings into a more tha common joy.

Balaustion's Adventure, dedicated to the Countes Cowper by whom the transcript from Euripides wa suggested, or, as Browning will have it, prescribed proved, as the dedication declares, "the most delightfu of May-month amusements" in the spring of 1871 It was the happiest of thoughts to give the version o Euripides' play that setting which has for its source a passage at the close of Plutarch's life of Nicias The favours bestowed by the Syracusans upon Athenian slaves and fugitives who could delight them by reciting or singing the verses of Euripides is no to be marvelled at, says Plutarch, "weying a reporte made of a ship of the city of Caunus, that on a time being chased thether by pyrates, thinking to save themselves within their portes, could not at the first be received, but had repulse : howbeit being demaunded whether they could sing any of Euripides songes, and aunswering that they could, were straight suffered to enter, and come in."[1] From this root blossomed Browning's romance of the Rhodian girl, who saves her country folk and wins a lover and a husband by her delight in the poetry of one who was more highly honoured abroad than in his own Athens. Perhaps Browning felt that an ardent girl would be the best interpreter of the womanly heroism and the pathos of "that strangest, saddest, sweetest song," of Euripides Of all its author's dramas the Alkestis is the most appropriate to the occasion, for it is the poem of a great deliverance from death, and here in effect it

[1] North's "Plutarch," 1579, p. 599.

livers from death, or worse, the fugitives from the rate-bark, "at destruction's very edge," who are the ppliants to Syracuse. In accepting the task im- osed upon him Browning must have felt that no her play of Euripides could so entirely have borne it the justice of the characterisation of the poet by rs Browning in the lines which he prefixed to *alaustion's Adventure*:

> Our Euripides the human,
> With his droppings of warm tears.

If the Alkestis is not the masterpiece of the genius Euripides," wrote Paul de Saint-Victor, "it is perhaps le masterpiece of his heart." [1]

Balaustion herself, not a rose of "the Rosy Isle" ut its wild-pomegranate-flower, since amid the verdure the tree "you shall find food, drink, odour all at nce," is Hellenic in her bright and swift intelligence, er enthusiasm for all noble things of the mind, the race of every movement of her spirit, her culture and er beauty. The atmosphere of the poem, which ncircles the translation, is singularly luminous and nimating; the narrative of the adventure is rapid yet ways lucid; the verse leaps buoyantly like a wave the sea. Balaustion tells her tale to the four Greek rls, her companions, amid the free things of nature, ne overhanging grape vines, the rippling stream,

> Outsmoothing galingale and watermint,
> Its mat-floor,

nd in presence of the little temple Baccheion, with its nctities of religion and of art. By a happy and riginal device the transcript of the Alkestis is much

[1] "Les Deux Masques," ii. 281.

more than a translation; it is a translation rendered into dramatic action—for we see and hear the performers and they are no longer masked—and this is accompanied with a commentary or an interpretation. Never was a more graceful apology for the function of the critic put forward than that of Balaustion:

> 'Tis the poet speaks:
> But if I, too, should try and speak at times,
> Leading your love to where my love, perchance,
> Climbed earlier, found a nest before you knew—
> Why, bear with the poor climber, for love's sake!

Browning has not often played the part of a critic and the interpretation of a poet's work by a poet has the double value of throwing light upon the mind of the original writer and the mind of his commentator.

The life of mortals and the life of the immortal gods are brought into a beautiful relation throughout the play. It is pre-eminently human in its grief and in its joy; yet at every point the divine care, the divine help surrounds and supports the children of earth, with their transitory tears and smiles. Apollo has been a herdsman in the service of Admetos. Herakles, most human of demigods, is the king's friend and guest. The interest of the play for Browning lay especially in three things—the pure self-sacrifice of the heroine, devotion embodied in one supreme deed; and no one can heighten the effect with which Euripides has rendered this; secondly, the joyous beneficent strength of Herakles, and this Browning has felt in a peculiar degree, and by his commentary has placed it in higher relief; and thirdly, the purification and elevation through suffering of the character of Admetos; here it would be rash to assert that

rowning has not divined the intention of Euripides, it certainly he has added something of his own. has been maintained that Browning's interpretation the spiritual significance of the drama is a beauti- l perversion of the purpose of the Greek poet; that dmetos needs no purification; that in accepting his fe's offer to be his substitute in dying, the king as no craven but a king who recognised duty to the ate as his highest duty. The general feeling of readers the play does not fall in with this ingenious plea. rowning, as appears from his imagined recast of the eme, which follows the transcript, had considered id rejected it. If Admetos is to be in some degree stified, it can only be by bearing in mind that the ct by which he shall himself escape from death is Apollo's institution, and that obedience to the rpose of Apollo rendered self-preservation a kind virtue. But Admetos makes no such defence of s action when replying to the reproaches of his ther, and he anticipates that the verdict of the world ill be against him. Browning undoubtedly presses e case against Admetos far more strongly than does uripides, who seems to hold that a man weak in one spect, weak when brought to face the test of death, ay yet be strong in the heroic mastery of grief hich is imposed upon him by the duties of hospital- y. Readers of the Winter's Tale have sometimes ondered whether there could be much rapture of y in the heart of the silent Hermione when she ceived back her unworthy husband. If Admetos mained at the close of the play what he is under- ood by Browning to have been at its opening, reunion ith a self-lover so base could hardly have flushed

with gladness the spirit of Alkestis just escaped fro
the shades.[1] But Alkestis, who had proved her ow
loyalty by deeds, values deeds more than word
When dying she had put her love into an act, an
had refrained from mere words of wifely tenderness
death put an end to her services to her husband; sh
felt towards him as any wife, if Browning's earlie
poem be true, may feel to any husband; but still sh
could render a service to her children, and she exact
from Admetos the promise that he will never plac
a stepmother over them. His allegiance to this vo
is an act, and it shall be for Alkestis the test of hi
entire loyalty. And the good Herakles, who enjoy
a glorious jest amazingly, and who by that jest ca
benevolently retort upon Admetos for his concealment o
Alkestis' death—for now the position is reversed and th
king shall receive her living, and yet believe her dea
—Herakles contrives to put Admetos to that precis
test which is alone sufficient to assure Alkestis of hi
fidelity. Words are words; but here is a deed, an
Admetos not only adheres to his pledge, but demon
strates to her that for him to violate it is impossible
She may well accept him as at length proved to b
her very own.

Browning, who delights to show how good i
brought out of evil, or what appears such to morta

[1] A comment of Paul de Saint-Victor on the silence of the recovere
Alkestis deserves to be quoted: "Hercule apprend à Admète qu'il lui e
interdit d'entendre sa voix avant qu'elle soit purifiée de sa consécratio
aux Divinités infernales. J'aime mieux voir dans cette réserve un scrupu
religieux du poète laissant à la morte sa dignité d'Ombre. Alceste a é
initiée aux profonds mystères de la mort; elle a vu l'invisible, elle
entendu l'ineffable; toute parole sortie de ses lèvres serait une divulgatio
sacrilège. Ce silence mystérieux la spiritualise et la rattache par u
dernier lien au monde éternel."

es, is not content with this. He must trace the ole process of the purification of the soul of Admetos, sorrow and its cruel yet beneficent reality, and in commentary he emphasises each point of develop- nt in that process. When his wife lies at the nt of death the sorrow of Admetos is not insincere, there was a childishness in it, for he would not nfront the fact that the event was of his own election. esently she has departed, and he begins to taste truth, to distinguish between a sorrow rehearsed fancy and endured in fact. In greeting Herakles rises to a manlier strain, puts tears away, and cepts the realities of life and death; he will not add to ill, as the sentimentalist does, but will be just the rights of earth that remain; he catches some nuine strength from the magnanimous presence of hero-god. He renders duty to the dead; is quieted; d enters more and more into the sternness of his itary wayfaring. In dealing with the ignoble wrangle h old Pheres the critic is hard set; but Balaustion, aking as interpreter for Browning, explains that for ittle the king lapses back from the firmer foothold ich he had attained. Perhaps it would have been er to admit that Euripides has marred his own work this grim tragic-comic encounter of crabbed age and uth. But it is true that one who has much to give, Alkestis, gives freely; and one who has little to e, like Pheres, clutches that little desperately and is rved not only in possessions but in soul. For owning the significance of the scene lies in the idea, ich if not just is ingenious, that the encounter with eres has an educational value for Admetos; he detests father because he sees in him an image of his own

egoism, and thus he learns more profoundly to ha
his baser self. When the body of Alkestis has be
borne away and the king re-enters his desolate ha
the full truth breaks in upon him; nothing can be
it has been before—"He stared at the impossible m
life"; he has learnt that life, which yet shall
rightly lived, is a harder thing than death:

> He was beginning to be like his wife.

And those around him felt that having descended
grief so far to the truth of things, he could not b
return to the light an altered and a better ma
Instructed so deeply in the realities of sorrow, Admet
is at last made worthy to receive the blessed realiti
of joy with the words,

> When I betray her, though she is no more,
> May I die.

The regeneration of Admetos is accomplished. Ho
much in all this exposition is derived from the pla
how much is added to it, may be left for the co
sideration of the reader who will compare the origi
with the transcript.

If the character of Admetos is somewhat lower
by Browning beneath the conception of the Gre
dramatist, to allow room for its subsequent elevati
the conception of Herakles is certainly heighten
We shall not say that Balaustion is the speaker and th
Herakles is somewhat of a woman's hero. Browni
himself fully enters into Balaustion's enthusiasm. A
the presence of the strong, joyous helper of men is
truth an inspiring one. The great voice that go
before him is itself a *Sursum corda!*—a challenge a
a summons to whatever manliness is in us. And t

st of it is that sauntering the pavement or crossing
e ferry we may happen to encounter this face of
erakles :

t of this face emerge banners and horses—O superb ! I see
what is coming ;
ee the high pioneer-caps—I see the staves of runners clearing
the way,
ear victorious drums.

is face is a life-boat.

r Walt Whitman too had seen Brother Jonathan
erakles, and indeed the face of the strong and tender
und-dresser was itself as the face of a calmer
erakles to many about to die. The speeches of the
nigod in Browning's transcript require an abundant
mmentary, but it is the commentary of an irre-
essible joy, an outbreak of enthusiasm which will
be controlled. The glorious Gargantuan creature,
the best sense Rabelaisian, is uplifted by Browning
o a very saint of joyous effort ; no pallid ascetic,
eed, beating his breast with the stone, but a
ristian saint of Luther's school, while at the same
ie a somewhat over-boisterous benevolent Paynim
nt :

Gladness be with thee, Helper of our world !
I think this is the authentic sign and seal
Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
Into a rage to suffer for mankind,
And recommence at sorrow.

mething of the Herakles ideal appears again and again
other poems of Browning. His Breton sailor, Hervé
el, has more than a touch of the Heraclean frankness
gaiety in arduous effort. His Ivàn Ivànovitch

wields the axe and abolishes a life with the Heracle joy in righteousness. And in the last of Browning poems, not without a pathetically over-boisterous effo and strain, there is the suggestion of an ideal conce tion of himself as a Herakles-Browning ; the old m tries at least to send his great voice before him.

The new Admetos, new Alkestis, imagined Balaustion at the close of the poem, are wedd lovers who, like the married in Pompilia's dream heaven, "know themselves into one." For them t severance of death has become an impossible thin and therefore no place is left for Herakles in t treatment of the story. It expresses Browning highest conception of the union of soul with soul :

> Therewith her whole soul entered into his,
> He looked the look back, and Alkestis died—

died only to be rejected by Hades, as still living, a with a more potent life, in her husband's heart a will. Yet the mortal cloud is round these mort still ; they cannot see things as the gods see. A for all their hopes and endeavours, the earth wh they would renew and make as heaven, remains old incredulous, unconverted earth,—"Such is the e Gods still bear mankind." And in such an earth not for them, assuredly for others, Herakles may f great deeds to do.

Balaustion has the unique distinction of be heroine throughout two of Browning's poems ; and both we may say that the genius of Euripides is hero. *Aristophanes' Apology* is written from first last with unflagging energy ; the translation of "Herakles" which it includes is a masculine a

asterly effort to transport the whole sense and spirit the original into English verse, and the rendering the choral passages into lyric form gives it an lvantage over the transcript of the "Alkestis." erhaps not a little of the self-defence of Aristophanes id his statement of the case against Euripides could ve been put as well or better in a critical essay in ose; but the method of Browning enables him to ingle, in a dramatic fashion, truth with sophistry, d to make both serve his purpose of presenting not ly the case but the character of the great Greek aker of comedy. Balaustion is no longer the ardent rl of the days of her first adventure; she is a wife, th the dignity, the authority of womanhood and fehood; she has known the life of Athens with its il and its good; she has been the favoured friend of ripides; she is capable of confronting his powerful al in popular favour, and of awing him into sobriety d becoming manners; with an instinctive avoidance e recoils from whatever is gross or uncomely; yet e can do honour to the true light of intellect and nius even though it shines through earth-born pours and amid base surroundings.

Athens, "the life and light of the whole world," has nk under the power of Sparta, and it can be hence-th no home for Balaustion and her Euthukles. e bark that bears them is bounding Rhodesward, d the verse has in it the leap and race of the prow. laustion, stricken at heart, yet feels that this tragedy Athens brings the tragic katharsis; the justice of gods is visible in it; and above man's wickedness d folly she reaches to "yon blue liberality of heaven." seems as if the spirit which might have saved Athens

is that of the loins girt and the lamp lit which was embodied in the strenuous devotion of Euripides to the highest things; and the spirit which has brought Athens to its ruin is that expressed with a splendid power through the work of Aristophanes. But Aristophanes shall plead for himself and leave nothing unsaid that can serve to vindicate him as a poet and even as a moralist. Thus only can truth in the end stand clear, assured of its supremacy over falsehood and over half-truth.

Nothing that Browning has written is more vividly imagined than the encounter of Balaustion with Aristophanes and his crew of revellers on the night when the tidings of the death of Euripides reached Athens; it rouses and controls the feelings with the tumult of life and the sanctity of death, while also imposing itself on the eye as a brilliant and a solemn picture. The revellers scatter before the presence of Balaustion, and she and the great traducer of Euripides stand face to face. Nowhere else has Browning presented this conception of the man of vast disorderly genius, who sees and approves the better way and splendidly follows the worse:

> Such domineering deity
> Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine
> For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path
> Which, purpling, recognised the conqueror.

It is as if male force, with the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life behind it, were met and held in check by the finer feminine force resting for its support upon the divine laws. But truth Aristophanes is half on the side of Balaustion

nd of Euripides; he must, indeed, make his stand; e is not one to falter or quail; and yet when the udden cloud falls upon his face he knows that it is is part to make the worse appear the better cause, nowing this all the more because the justice of alaustion's regard perceives and recognises his higher elf. Suddenly the Tuphon, "madding the brine ith wrath or monstrous sport," is transformed into omething like what the child saw once from the hodian sea-coast (the old romantic poet in Browning here young once more):

> All at once, large-looming from his wave,
> Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the ledge,
> A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,
> Divine with yearning after fellowship.
> He rose but breast-high. So much god she saw;
> So much she sees now, and does reverence.

But in a moment the sea-god is again the sea-onster, with "tail-splash, frisk of fin"; the majestic ristophanes relapses into the most wonderful of ockers.

No passage in the poem is quite so impressive as is through its strangeness in beauty. But the entry Sophocles—"an old pale-swathed majesty,"—at e supper which followed the performance of the ay, is another of those passages to find which *in situ* a sufficient reward for reading many laborious pages at might almost as well have been thrown into an aginary conversation in prose:

> Then the grey brow sank low, and Sophokles
> Re-swathed him, sweeping doorward: mutely passed
> 'Twixt rows as mute.

The critical study of comedy, its origin, its develop
ment, its function, its decline, is written with admirabl
vigour, but the case of Aristophanes can be read else
where. It is interesting, however, to note the argu
ment in support of the thesis that comedy points reall
to ideals of humanity which are beyond human attain
ment; that its mockery of man's infirmities implies
conception of our nature which in truth is extra-human
while tragedy on the contrary accepts man as he i
in his veritable weakness and veritable strength, an
wrings its pity and its terror out of these. It i
Aristophanes who thus vindicates Euripides before th
revellers who have assembled in his own honour, an
they accept what seems to them a paradox as his fines
stroke of irony. But he has indeed after the solem
withdrawal of Sophocles looked for a moment throug
life and death, and seen in his hour of highest succes
his depth of failure. For him, in this testing-time
life, art has been the means of probation; he ha
squandered the gifts bestowed upon him, which shou
have been concentrated in the special task to which h
was summoned. He should have known—he did
fact know—that the art which "makes grave"
higher than that which "makes grin"; his ow
peculiar duty was to advance his art one step beyon
his predecessors; to create a drama which shou
bring into harmony the virtue of tragedy and th
virtue of comedy; to discover the poetry which

> Makes wise, not grave,—and glad,
> Not grinning: whereby laughter joins with tears.

Instead of making this advance he had retrograded
and it remained for a poet of a far-off future in th

far-off Kassiterides—the Tin Isle which has Stratford at its heart—to accomplish the task on which Aristophanes would not adventure. One way a brilliant success was certain for Aristophanes; the other and better way failure was possible; and he declined to make the venture of faith. It is with this sense of self-condemnation upon him that he essays his own defence, and it is against this sense of self-condemnation more than against the genius and the methods of Euripides that he struggles. When towards the close of the poem he takes in hand the psalterion, and chants in splendid strains the story of Thamuris, who aspired and failed, as he himself will never do, the reader is almost won over to his side. Browning, who felt the heights and depths of the lyric genius of Aristophanes, would seem to have resolved that in this song of "Thamuris marching," moving in ecstasy amid the glories of an autumn morning, he would dramatically justify his conception of the poet; and never in his youth did Browning sing with a finer rapture of spirit. But reading what follows, the record of the subjugation of Athens, when the Athenian people accept the ruin of their defences as if it were but a fragment of Aristophanic comedy, we perceive that this song, which breaks off with an uproar of laughter, is the condemnation as well as the glory of the singer.

The translation of *Agamemnon*, the preface to which is dated "October 1st, 1877," was undertaken at the request or command of Carlyle. The argument of the preface fails to justify Browning's method. A translation "literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language" may be highly desirable; it is

commonly called a "crib"; and a crib contrived by one who is not only a scholar but a man of genius will now and again yield a word or a phrase of felicitous precision. But that a translation "literal at every cost" should be put into verse is a wrong both to the original and to the poetry of the language to which the original is transferred; it assumes a poetic garb which in assuming it rends to tatters. A translation into verse implies that a certain beauty of form is part of the writer's aim; it implies that a poem is to be reproduced as a poem, and not as that bastard product of learned ill judgment — a glorified crib; and a glorified crib is necessarily a bad crib. Mrs Orr, who tells us that Browning refused to regard even the first of Greek writers as models of literary style, had no doubt that the translation of the *Agamemnon* was partly made for the pleasure of exposing the false claims made on their behalf. Such a supposition does not agree well with Browning's own Preface; but if he had desired to prove that the *Agamemnon* can be so rendered as to be barely readable, he has been singularly successful. From first to last in the genius of Browning there was an element, showing itself from time to time, of strange perversity.

Chapter XIV

Problem and Narrative Poems

Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, which appeared in December 1871, four months after the publication of *Balaustion's Adventure*, was written by Browning during a visit to friends in Scotland. His interest in modern politics was considerable, but in general it remained remote from his work as a poet. He professed himself a liberal, but he was a liberal who because he was such, claimed the right of independent judgment. He had rejoiced in the enfranchisement of Italy. During the American Civil War he was strongly on the side of the North, as letters to Story, written when his private grief lay heavy upon him, abundantly show. He was at one time a friend of the movement in favour of granting the parliamentary suffrage to women, but late in life his opinion on this question altered. He was as decidedly opposed to the proposals for a separate or subordinate Parliament for Ireland as were his friends Carlyle and Tennyson and Matthew Arnold. After the introduction of the Home Rule Bill he could not bring himself, though requested by a friend, to write words which would have expressed or implied esteem for the statesman who had made that most inopportune experiment in opportunism [1] and those talents he admired. Yet for a certain kind of

[1] See Morley's "Life of Gladstone," vol. iii. p. 417.

opportunism—that which conserves rather than destroys—Browning thought that much might fairly be said. To say this with a special reference to the fallen Emperor of France he wrote his *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau.*

Browning's instinctive sympathies are not with the "Saviour of Society," who maintains for temporary reasons a tottering edifice. He naturally applauds the man who builds on sure foundations, or the man who in order to reach those foundations boldly removes the accumulated lumber of the past. But there are times when perhaps the choice lies only between conservation of what is imperfect and the attempt to erect an airy fabric which has no basis upon the solid earth; and Browning on the whole preferred a veritable *civitas hominum*, however remote from the ideal, to a sham *civitas Dei* or a real Cloud-cuckootown. "It is true, that what is settled by custom, though it be not good, yet at least it is fit; and those things which have long gone together, are as it were confederate within themselves; whereas new things piece not so well; but though they help by their utility, yet they trouble by their inconformity." These words, of one whose worldly wisdom was more profoundly studied than ever Browning's was, might stand as a motto for the poem. But the pregnant sentence of Bacon which follows these words should be added—"All this is true if time stood still." Browning's pleading is not a merely ingenious defence of the untenable, either with reference to the general thesis or its application to the French Empire. He did not, like his wife, think of the Emperor as if he were a paladin of modern romance; but he honestly

believed that he had for a time done genuine service —though not the highest—to France and to the world. "My opinion of the solid good rendered years ago," he wrote in September 1863 to Story, 'is unchanged. The subsequent deference to the clerical party in France and support of brigandage is poor work; but it surely is doing little harm to the general good." And to Miss Blagden after the publication of his poem: "I thought badly of him at the beginning of his career, *et pour cause*; better afterward, on the strength of the promises he made, and gave indications of intending to redeem. I think him very weak in the last miserable year." It seemed to Browning a case in which a veritable *apologia* was admissible in the interests of truth and justice, and by placing this *apologia* in the mouth of the Emperor himself certain sophistries were also legitimate that might help to give the whole the dramatic character which the purposes of poetry, as the exposition of a complex human character, required.

The misfortune was that in making choice of such a subject Browning condemned himself to write with his left hand, to fight with one arm pinioned, to exhibit the case on behalf of the "Saviour of Society" with his brain rather than with brain and heart acting together. He was to demonstrate that in the scale of spiritual colours there is a respectable place for drab. This may be undertaken with skill and vigour, but hardly with enthusiastic pleasure. *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* is an interesting intellectual exercise, and if this constitutes a poem, a poem it is; but the theme is fitter for a prose discussion. Brown-

ing's intellectual ability became a snare by which the poet within him was entrapped. The music that he makes here is the music of Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha :

> So your fugue broadens and thickens,
> Greatens and deepens and lengthens,
> Till one exclaims—" But where's music, the dickens ! "

The mysterious Sphinx who expounds his riddle and dissertates on himself in an imaginary Leicester Square says many things that deserve to be considered ; but they are addressed to our understanding in the first instance, and only in a secondary and indirect way reach our feelings and our imagination. The interest of the poem is virtually exhausted in a single reading ; to a true work of art we return again and again for renewed delight. We return to *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* as to a valuable store-house of arguments or practical considerations in defence of a conservative opportunism ; but if we have once appropriated these, we do not need the book. There is a spirit of conservation, like that of Edmund Burke, which has in it a wise enthusiasm, we might almost say a wise mysticism. Browning's Prince is not a conservator possessed by this enthusiasm. Something almost pathetic may be felt in his sense that the work allotted to him is work of mere temporary and transitory utility. He has no high inspirations such as support the men who change the face of the world. The Divine Ruler who has given him his special faculties, who has enjoined upon him his special tasks, holds no further communication with him. But he will do the work of a mere man in a man's strength

such as it is; he cannot make new things; he can use the thing he finds; he can for a term of years "do the best with the least change possible"; he can turn to good account what is already half-made; and so, he believes, he can, in a sense, co-operate with God. So long as he was an irresponsible dreamer, a mere voice in the air, it was permitted him to indulge in glorious dreams, to utter shining words. Now that his feet are on the earth, now that his thoughts convert themselves into deeds, he must accept the limitations of earth. The idealists may put forth this programme and that; his business is not with them but with the present needs of the humble mass of his people—"men that have wives and women that have babes," whose first demand is bread; by intelligence and sympathy he will effect "equal sustainment everywhere" throughout society; and when the man of genius who is to alter the world arises, such a man most of all will approve the work of his predecessor, who left him no mere "shine and shade" on which to operate, but the good hard substance of common human life.

All this is admirably put, and it is interesting to find that Browning, who had rejoiced with Herakles doing great deeds and purging the world of monsters, could also honour a poor provisional Atlas whose task of sustaining a poor imperfect globe upon his shoulders is less brilliant but not perhaps less useful. Nor would it be just to overlook the fact that in three or four pages the poet asserts himself as more than the prudent casuist. The splendid image of society as a temple from which winds the long procession of powers and beauties has in it something of the fine mysticism

of Edmund Burke.[1] The record of the Prince's early and irresponsible aspirations for a free Italy—

> Ay, still my fragments wander, music-fraught,
> Sighs of the soul, mine once, mine now, and mine
> For ever!—

with what immediately follows, would have satisfied the ardent spirit of Mrs Browning.[2] And the characterisation of the genius of the French nation, whose lust for war and the glory of war Browning censures as "the dry-rot of the race," rises brilliantly out of its somewhat gray surroundings:—

> The people here,
> Earth presses to her heart, nor owns a pride
> Above her pride i' the race all flame and air
> And aspiration to the boundless Great,
> The incommensurably Beautiful—
> Whose very faulterings groundward come of flight
> Urged by a pinion all too passionate
> For heaven and what it holds of gloom and glow:
> Bravest of thinkers, bravest of the brave
> Doers, exalt in Science, rapturous
> In Art, the—more than all—magnetic race
> To fascinate their fellows, mould mankind.

It is a passage conceived in the same spirit as the great chaunt "O Star of France!" written, at the same date, and with a recognition of both the virtues and the shames of France, by the American poet of Democracy. To these memorable fragments from *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* one other may be added—that towards the close of the poem which applies the tradition of the succession by murder of the priesthood at the shrine of the Clitumnian god to the

[1] Pages 46, 47 of the first edition.

[2] Pages 58-60.

uccession of men of genius in the priesthood of the vorld—"The new power slays the old, but handsomely."

In *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* there is nothing nigmatical. "It is just what I imagine the man night, if he pleased, say for himself," so Browning vrote to Miss Blagden soon after the publication of he volume. Many persons, however, have supposed hat in *Fifine at the Fair* (1872) a riddle rather than a oem was given to the world by the perversity of the vriter. When she comes to speak of this work Browning's biographer Mrs Orr is half-apologetic; it s for her "a piece of perplexing cynicism." The rigin of the poem was twofold. The external uggestion came from the fact that during one of is visits to Pornic, Browning had seen the original f his Fifine, and she lived in his memory as a subject f intellectual curiosity and imaginative interest. The nternal suggestion, as Mrs Orr hints, lay in a certain nood of resentment against himself arising from the act that the encroachments of the world seemed to strange in some degree a part of his complex being rom entire fidelity to his own past. The world, in act, seemed to be playing with Browning the part of Fifine. If this were so, it would be characteristic of Browning that he should face round upon the world nd come to an explanation with his adversary. But his could not in a printed volume be done in his own erson; he was not one to take the public into his onfidence. The discussion should be removed as far s possible from his own circumstances and even his wn feelings. It should be a dramatic debate on the ubject of fidelity and infidelity, on the bearings of he apparent to the true, on the relation of reality in

this our mortal life to illusion. As he studied the subject it assumed new significances and opened up wider issues. An actual Elvire and an actual Fifine may be the starting points, but by-and-by Elvire shall stand for all that is permanent and substantial in thought and feeling, Fifine for all that is transitory and illusive. The question of conjugal fidelity is as much the subject of *Fifine at the Fair* as the virtue of tar-water is the subject of Berkeley's *Siris*. The poem is in fact Browning's *Siris*—a chain of thoughts and feelings, reaching with no break in the chain, from a humble basis to the heights of speculation.

But before all else *Fifine at the Fair* is a poem. Of all the longer poems which followed *The Ring and the Book* it is the most sustained and the most diversified in imaginative power. To point out passages of peculiar beauty, passages vivid in feeling, original in thought, would here be out of place; for the brilliance and vigour are unflagging, and what we have to complain of is the lack of some passages of repose. The joy in freedom—freedom accepting some hidden law—of these poor losels and truants from convention, who stroll it and stage it, the gypsy figure of Fifine in page costume, the procession of imagined beauties—Helen Cleopatra, the Saint of Pornic Church—the half-emerging, half-undelivered statue by Michelagnolo, the praise of music as nearer to the soul than words, sunset at Saint-Marie, the play of the body in the sea at noon tide (with all that it typifies), woman as the rille leaping to the sea, woman as the dolphin that upbears Orion, the Venetian carnival, which is the carnival of human life, darkness fallen upon the plains, and through the darkness the Druidic stones gleaming—all these

are essentially parts of the texture of the poem, yet each has a lustre or a shimmer or grave splendour of its own.

It is strange that any reader should have supposed either the Prologue or the Epilogue to be uttered by the imaginary speaker of the poem. Both shadow forth the personal feelings of Browning; the prologue tells of the gladness he still found both in the world of imagination and the world of reality, over which hovers the spirit that had once been so near his own, the spirit that is near him still, yet moving on a different plane, perhaps wondering at or pitying this life of his, which yet he accepts with cheer and will turn to the best account; the epilogue veils behind its grim humour the desolate feeling that came upon him again and again as a householder in this house of life, for behind the happiness which he strenuously maintained, there lay a great desolation. But the last word of the epilogue—"Love is all and Death is nought" is a word of sustainment wrung out of sorrow. These poems have surely in them no "perplexing cynicism," nor has the poem enclosed between them, when it is seen aright. Browning's idea in the poem he declared in reply to a question of Dr Furnivall, "was to show merely how a Don Juan might justify himself, partly by truth, somewhat by sophistry." No more unhappy misnomer than this "Don Juan" could have been devised for the curious, ingenious, learned experimenter in life, no man of pleasure, in the vulgar sense of the word, but a deliberate explorer of thoughts and things, who argues out his case with so much fine casuistry and often with the justest conceptions of human character and conduct. If we could discover a dividing

line between his truth and his sophistry, we might discover also that the poem is no exceptional work of Browning, for which an apology is required, but of a piece with his other writings and in harmony with the body of thought and feeling expressed through them. Now it is certain that as Browning advanced in years he more and more distrusted the results of the intellect in its speculative research; he relied more and more upon the knowledge that comes through or is embodied in love. Love by its very nature implies a relation; what is felt is real for us. But the intellect, which aspires to know things as they are, forever lands us in illusions —illusions needful for our education, and therefore far from unprofitable, to be forever replaced by fresh illusions; and the only truth we thus attain is the conviction that truth there assuredly is, that we must forever reach after it, and must forever grasp its shadow. Theologies, philosophies, scientific theories —these change like the shifting and shredding clouds before our eyes, and are forever succeeded by clouds of another shape and hue. But the knowledge involved in love is veritable and is verified at least for us who love. While in his practice he grew more scientific in research for truth, and less artistic in his desire for beauty, such was the doctrine which Browning upheld.

The speaker in *Fifine at the Fair* is far more a seeker for knowledge than he is a lover. And he has learnt, and learnt aright, that by illusions the intellect is thrown forward towards what may relatively be termed the truth; through shadows it advances upon reality. When he argues that philosophies and theologies are the fizgigs of the brain, its Fifines the false which lead us onward to Elvire the true, he

xpresses an idea which Browning has repeatedly xpressed in *Ferishtah's Fancies* and which, certainly, as an idea he had made his own. And if a man pproaches the other sex primarily with a view to nowledge, with a view to confirm and to extend his wn self-consciousness and to acquire experience of ie strength and the weakness of womanhood, it is ue that he will be instructed more widely, if not ore deeply, by Elvire supplemented by Fifine than y Elvire alone. The sophistry of the speaker in rowning's poem consists chiefly in a juggle between nowledge and love, and in asserting as true of love hat Browning held to be, in the profoundest sense, ue of knowledge. The poet desires, as Butler in his Analogy" desired, to take lower ground than his wn; but the curious student of man and woman, of ve and knowledge—imagination aiding his intellect —is compelled, amid his sophistical jugglings, to work ut his problems upon Browning's own lines, and he ecomes a witness to Browning's own conclusions. aul, before the poem closes, is also among the rophets. For him, as for Browning, "God and the ul stand sure." He sees, as Browning sees, man aching upward through illusions—religious theories, ilosophical systems, scientific hypotheses, artistic ethods, scholarly attainments—to the Divine. The ornic fair has become the Venice carnival, and this as grown to the vision of man's life, in which the anton and coquette named a philosophy or a theology as replaced the gipsy in tricot. The speaker mis-pplies to love and the truths obtained by love Brown-g's doctrine concerning knowledge. And yet, even o, he is forced to confess, however inconsistent his

action may be with his belief, that the permanent which is the Divine—can be reached through a sing central point of human love, but not through any va attempt to manufacture an infinite by piecing togeth a multitude of detached points:

> His problem posed aright
> Was—"From a given point evolve the infinite!"
> Not—"Spend thyself in space, endeavouring to joint
> Together, and so make infinite, point and point:
> Fix into one Elvire a Fair-ful of Fifines!"

If he continues his experiments, they are exper ments of the senses or of the intellect, which he know can bring no profit to the heart: "Out of thine ow mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." H will undoubtedly—let this be frankly acknowledged grow in a certain kind of knowledge, and as certain he will dwindle in the higher knowledge that com through love. The poem is neither enigmatical n cynical, but in entire accord with Browning's ow deepest convictions and highest feelings.[1]

Although in his later writings Browning render ever more and more homage to the illuminating pow of the affections, his methods unfortunately becam as has been said, more and more scientific, or—sha we say?—pseudo-scientific. Art jealously selects i subjects, those which possess in a high degree spiritu or material beauty, or that more complete beau which unites the two. Science accepts any subje which promises to yield its appropriate truth. Brow ing, probing after psychological truth, became t

[1] It may here be noted that Dante Rossetti in a morbid mood suppos that certain passages of *Fifine* were directed against himself; and ceased his friendship with Browning.

lifferent to the truth of beauty. Or shall we say at his vision of beauty became enlarged, so that in ving bare by dissection the anatomy of any poor rpse, he found an artistic joy in studying the enlacements of veins and nerves? To say this is perhaps cheat oneself with words. His own defence would, ubtless, have been a development of two lines which cur near the close of *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*:

> Love bids touch truth, endure truth, and embrace
> Truth, though, embracing truth, love crush itself.

nd he would have pleaded that art, which he styles

> The love of loving, rage
> Of knowing, seeing, feeling the absolute truth of things
> For truth's sake, whole and sole,

ay "crush itself" for sake of the truth which is its d and aim. But the greatest masters have not ught for beauty merely or mainly in the dissection ugliness, nor did they find their rejoicing in artistic cide for the sake of psychological discovery. To owning such a repulsive story as that of *Red Cotton ight-Cap Country* served now as well as one which in rlier days would have attracted him by its grandeur its grace. Here was a fine morbid growth, an emplary moral wen, the enormous product of two nds of corruption—sensuality and superstition, and nat could be a more fortunate field for exploration th aid of the scalpel? The incidents of the poem ere historical and were recent. Antoine Mellerio, e sometime jeweller of Paris, had flung himself from s belvedere in 1870; the suit, which raised the estion of his sanity at the date when his will had en signed, was closed in 1872; the scene of his

death was close to Browning's place of summer sojou
Saint-Aubin. The subject lay close to Brownin
hand. It was an excellent subject for a short sto
of the kind that gets the name of realistic. It was
unfortunate subject for a long poem. But the botan
who desires to study vegetable physiology does n
require a lily or a rose. Browning who viewed thin
from the ethical as well as the psychological stan
point was attracted to the story partly because it w
he thought, a story with a moral. He did not mere
wish to examine as a spiritual chemist the action
Castilian blood upon a French brain, to watch a
make a report upon the behaviour of inherited fa
when brought into contact with acquired scepticism-
the scepticism induced by the sensual temperament
the boulevards; he did not merely wish to exhibit t
difficulties and dangers of a life divided against itse
His purpose was also to rebuke that romantic sen
mentalism which would preserve the picturesque lumb
of ruined faiths and discredited opinions, that ha
done their work, and remain only as sources of dang
to persons who are weak of brain and dim of sig
Granted the conditions, it was, Browning maintai
an act of entire sanity on the part of his sorry he
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, to fling himself into m
air, to put his faith to the final test, and trust to c
Blessed Lady, the bespangled and bejewelled Rav
sante, to bear him in safety through the air. But t
conditions were deplorable; and those who declin
to assist in carting away the rubbish of mediævalis
are responsible for Léonce Miranda's bloody night-c

The moral is just, and the story bears it well. Y
Browning's own conviction that man's highest a

arest faith is no more than a shadow of the un-ainable truth may for a moment give us pause. iconoclast, even such an iconoclast as Voltaire, is inarily a man of unqualified faith in the conclusions the intellect. If our best conceptions of things ine be but a kind of parable, why quarrel with the ables accepted by other minds than our own? e answer is twofold. First Browning was not a ptic with respect to the truths attained through e, and he held that mankind had already attained ough love truths that condemned the religion of -torture and terrified propitiations, which led Léonce randa to reduce his right hand and his left to bonised stumps and dragged him kneeling along country roads to manifest his devotion to the age of the Virgin. Secondly he held that our ication through intellectual illusions is a progressive ication, and that to seek to live in an obsolete sion is treason against humanity. Therefore his nortation is justified by his logic:

> Quick conclude
> Removal, time effects so tardily,
> Of what is plain obstruction; rubbish cleared,
> Let partial-ruin stand while ruin may,
> And serve world's use, since use is manifold.

e tower which once served as a belfry may possibly still of use to some Father Secchi to "tick Venus in transit"; only never bring bell again to the tial-ruin,

> To damage him aloft, brain us below,
> When new vibrations bury both in brick.

r which sane word, if not for all the pages of his em, we may feel gratefully towards the writer. It

is the word of Browning the moralist. The study the double-minded hero belongs to Browning psychologist. The admirable portrait of Clara, successful adventuress, harlot and favoured daugh of the Church, is the chief gift received through t poem from Browning the artist. She is a v admirable specimen of her kind—the *mamestra brass* species of caterpillar, and having with beautiful aplo outmanœuvred and flouted the rapacious cousinry, Cl is seen at the last, under the protection of Holy Chur still quietly devouring her Miranda leaf—such is the irc of nature, and the merit of a perfect digestive apparat

The second narrative poem of this period, *The Album* (1875), is in truth a short series of drama scenes, placed in a narrative frame-work. It is concentrated as *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* diffuse; and the unities of time and place assist tragic concentration. A recast of *The Inn Album* mig indeed have appeared as a drama on the Elizabeth stage side by side with such a brief masterpiece, pite and terrible, as "A Yorkshire Tragedy"; it mo with a like appalling rapidity towards the climax a the catastrophe. The incident of the attemp barter of a discarded mistress to clear off the sc of a gambling debt is derived from the scandal chronicle of English nineteenth century socie Browning's tale of crime was styled on its appearan by a distinguished critic of Elizabethan drama story of a "penny dreadful." He was right; but should have added that some of the most impress and elevated pieces of our dramatic literature ha

[1] Fanny Kemble also derived from the story of Lord De Ros the sub of her "English Tragedy."

d sources of no greater dignity. The story of the enny dreadful" is here rehandled and becomes a gedy of which the material part is only a translan into external deed of a tragedy of the soul. The *amatis personæ*, as refashioned from the crude fact d the central passions of the poem, were such as ould naturally call forth what was characteristic in owning's genius. A martyr of love, a traitor to ve, an avenger of love,—these are the central figures. he girlish innocence of the cousin is needed only as ray of morning sunlight to relieve the eye that is ained and pained by the darkness and the pallor of e faces of the exponents of passion. And a like fect is produced by the glimpses of landscape, rich the English qualities of cultured gladness and pose, which Browning so seldom presented, but hich are perfectly rendered here:

> The wooded watered country, hill and dale
> And steel-bright thread of stream, a-smoke with mist
> A-sparkle with May morning, diamond drift
> O' the sun-touched dew.

We must feel that life goes on with leisurely happiess outside the little room that isolates its tragic ccupants; the smoke from fires of turf and wood in the air; cottagers are at their morning cookery. fter all the poet of the inn album was well inspired his eloquent address:—"Hail, calm acclivity, saluious spot!" and only certain incidents, which time ill soon efface, have touched the salutation with irony.

In this poem Browning reverts to his earlier method f clearly and simply dividing the evil from the good. Ve are not embarrassed by the mingling of truth ith sophistry; our instinctive sympathies are not

held in check, but are on the contrary reinforced the undisguised sympathies of the writer. We no more in doubt where wrong and where justice than if Count Gismond were confronting Cc Gauthier. The avenger, indeed, is no champion romance; he is only a young English snob, a li slow of brain, a little unrefined in manner, a "clur giant handsome creature," who for a year has triec acquire under an accomplished tutor the lore cynical worldliness, and has not succeeded, for he manly and honest, and has the gentleness of streng "for ability, all's in the rough yet." Of his educat the best part is that he has once loved and b thwarted in his love. And now in a careless-earn regard for his cousin his need is that of occupat for his big, idle boy's heart; he wants something do, someone also to serve. Browning wishes to sh the passion of righteousness, which suddenly flan forth and abolishes an evil thing as springing fr no peculiar knightly virtue but from mere hon human nature. The huge boy, somewhat crude, son what awkward, with a moral temper still unclarifi has enough of our good, common humanity in h to hold no parley with utter wickedness, when once fully apprehends its nature; therefore he springs up it in one swift transport of rage and there and then mak an end of it. His big red hands are as much the inst ments of divine justice as is the axe of Ivàn Ivànovit

The traitor of the poem is "refinement every in from brow to boot-heel"; and in this respect it cann be said that Browning's villain departs widely fr the conventional, melodramatic villain of the stage. has perhaps like the stage villain a little too mu

that cheap knowingness, which is the theatrical ge of the complete man of the world, but which tlemen in actual life do not ordinarily affect. ere is here and elsewhere in Browning's later poetry newhat too free an indulgence in this cheap know- ness, as if with a nod and a wink he would inform that he has a man of the world's acquaintance with shady side of life; and this is not quite good art, is it quite good manners. The vulgarity of the n in the street may have a redeeming touch of mal spirits, if not of *naïveté,* in it; the vulgarity the man in the club, "refinement every inch" is ond redemption. The exhibition of Browning's tor as having slipped lower and lower down the es of baseness because he has been false to his e experience of veritable love may remind us also he melodramatic stage villain; but the tragic and hetic motives of melodrama, its demonstrative oisms, its stage generosities, its striking attitudes, really fictions founded upon fact, and the facts ich give some credit to the stage fictions remain the true creator of tragedy to discover and inter- t aright. The melodramatic is often the truth falsely feebly handled; the same truth handled aright may come tragic. There is much in Shakespeare's plays ich if treated by an inferior artist would at once k from tragedy to melodrama. Browning escapes m melodrama but not to such a safe position that can quite forget its neighbourhood. When the itor of this poem is withdrawn—as was Guido—

> Into that sad obscure sequestered state
> Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
> He else made first in vain,

there will be found in him that he knew the wo of love, that he saw the horror of the void which he lived, and that for a moment—though late—a sudden wave of not ignoble passion ov whelmed his baser self, even if only to let the fa of the treacherous rock reappear in their starkn and cruelty.

The lady, again, with her superb statue-like beau her low wide brow

> Oppressed by sweeps of hair
> Darker and darker as they coil and swathe
> The crowned corpse-wanness whence the eyes burn black,

her passion, her despair, her recovery through chilli to ice the heart within her, her reawakening to l and the pain of that return to sensation, her measu less scorn of her betrayer, her exposure of his l fraud, and her self-sought death—the lady is dang ously near the melodramatic heroine, and yet she is n a melodramatic but a tragic figure. Far more th Pompilia, who knew the joy of motherhood, is s the martyr of love. And yet, before she quits li in her protective care of that somewhat formidab somewhat ungainly baby, the huge boy, her champi hero and snob, she finds a comforting maternal insti at work :

> Did you love me once?
> Then take love's last and best return! I think
> Womanliness means only motherhood;
> All love begins and ends there,—roams enough,
> But, having run the circle, rests at home.

Her husband, good man, will not suffer acutely her loss; he will be true to duty, and continue to d

flock with the comfortable dogma of hell-fire, in ich not one of them believes.

The *Pacchiarotto* volume of 1876 was the first col-tion of miscellaneous poetry put forth by Browning ce the appearance, twelve years previously, of *amatis Personæ*.[1] There is, of course, throughout whole the presence of a vigorous personality; we in an occasional mood tumble and toss even in rough verse of *Pacchiarotto*, as we do on a choppy on which the sun is a-shine, and which invigorates ile it—not always agreeably—bobs our head, and shes down our throat. But vigour alone does not duce poetry, and it may easily run into a kind good-humoured effrontery. The speciality of the ume as compared with its predecessors is that it ntains not a little running comment by Browning on himself and his own work, together with a jocular-rage reply to his unfriendly critics. There is a le too much in all this of the robustious Herakles ding his great voice before him. An author ought be aware of the fact that no pledge to admire him d his writings has been administered to every one o enters the world, and that as sure as he attracts, surely must he repel. In the *Epilogue* the poet orms his readers that those who expect from him, from any poet, strong wine of verse which is also eet demand the impossible. Sweet the strong wine n become only after it has long lain mellowing in cask. The experience of Browning's readers con-dicted the assertion. Some who drank the good nes of 1855 and of 1864 in the year of the vintages

[1] Some sentences in what follows are taken from a notice of the volume ch I wrote on its appearance for *The Academy*.

found that they were strong and needed no keep to be sweet. Wine-tasters must make distinctio and the quality of the yield of 1876 does not ent it to be remembered as an extraordinary year.

The poem from which the volume was named t in verse, "timed by raps of the knuckle," how painter Pacchiarotto must needs become a wo reformer, or at least a city-reformer in his distres Siena, with no good results for his city and w disastrous results for himself. He learns by savoury experience his lesson, to hold on by paint-brush and maul-stick, and do his own wo accepting the mingled evil and good of life in spirit of strenuous—not indolent—*laissez-faire*, pl ing, as energetically as a human being can, his o part, and leaving others to play theirs, assured t for all and each this life is the trial-time and t of eternity, the rehearsal for the performance in future world, and "Things rarely go smooth Rehearsal." Browning's joy in difficult rhyming seen in this serio-grotesque jingle was great; so readers may be permitted to wish that many of rhymes were not merely difficult but impossible. a dinner given by Sir Leslie Stephen he met succe fully the challenge to produce a rhyme for "rhinocer and for Tennyson's diversion he delivered himself an impromptu in which rhymes were found "Ecclefechan" and "Craigenputtock." But in rhy ing ingenuity Browning is inferior to the author "Hudibras," in a rhymer's elegant effrontery he inferior to the author of "Don Juan." Brownin good-humoured effrontery in his rhymes expects much good-humour from his reader, who may

liable enough to accept rough and ready successes, t cannot often be delighted by brilliant gymnastics sound and sense. In like manner it asks for a rticularly well-disposed reader to appreciate the wit Browning's retort upon his critics: "You are mney-sweeps," he sings out in his great voice, sten! I have invented several insulting nicknames you. Decamp! or my housemaid will fling the ps in your faces." This may appear to some rsons to be genial and clever. It certainly has none of e exquisite malignity of Pope's poisoned rapier. Perps it is a little dull; perhaps it is a little outrageous. The Browning who masks as Shakespeare in *At the ermaid* disclaims the ambition of heading a poetical ction, condemns the Byronic *Welt-schmerz*, and announces his resolvedly cheerful acceptance of life. sewhere he assures his readers that though his ork is theirs his life is his own; he will not unlock s heart in sonnets. Such is the drift of the verses titled *House*; a peep through the window is pertted, but "please you, no foot over threshold of ine." This was not Shakespeare's wiser way; if he d himself behind his work, it was with the openness d with the taciturnity of Nature. He did not stand the window of his "House" declaring that he was t to be seen; he did not pull up and draw down e blind to make it appear that he was at home and t at home. In the poem *Shop* Browning continues s assurances that he is no Eglamor to whom verse "a temple-worship vague and vast." Verse-making his trade as jewel-setting and jewel-selling is the ldsmith's—but do you suppose that the poet lives life of his own?—how and where it is not for you

to guess, only be certain it is far away from his coun and his till. These poems were needless confiden to the public that no confidences would be vouchsa to them.

But the volume of 1876 contains better work th these pieces of self-assertion. The two love-lyr *Natural Magic* and *Magical Nature* have each them a surprise of beauty; the one tells of the fai tale of love, the other of its inward glow and gem-li stability. *Bifurcation* is characteristic of the write the woman who chooses duty rather than love m have done well, but she has chosen the easier way a perhaps has evaded the probation of life; the m who chooses passion rather than duty has slipped a stumbled, but his was the harder course and perha the better. Which of the two was sinner? whi was saint? To be impeccable may be the mo damning of offences. In *St Martin's Summer* t eerie presence of ghosts of dead loves, haunting love that has grown upon the graves of the past, a check upon passion, which by a sudden turn at t close triumphs in a victory that is defeat. *Fears a Scruples* is a confession of the trials of theistic faith a world from which God seems to be an absent What had been supposed to be letters from our frie are proved forgeries; what we called his loving actio are the accumulated results of the natural law heredity. Yet even if theism had to be abandon it would have borne fruit:

> All my days I'll go the softlier, sadlier
> For that dream's sake! How forget the thrill
> Through and through me as I thought "The gladlier
> Lives my friend because I love him still?"

d the friend will value love all the more which rsists through the obstacles of partial ignorance.[1] e blank verse monologue *A Forgiveness*, Browning's panish Tragedy," is a romance of passion, subtle in psychology, tragic in its action. Out of its dark- ss gleams especially one resplendent passage—the scription of those weapons of Eastern workmanship—

Horror coquetting with voluptuousness—

e of which is the instrument chosen by the husband's cred, now replacing his contempt, to confer on his e a death that is voluptuous. The grim-grotesque ident from the history of the Jews in Italy related *Filippo Baldinucci* recalls the comedy and the pathos *Holy Cross Day*, to which it is in every respect erior. The Jew of the centuries of Christian per- ution is for Browning's imagination a being half- blime and half-grotesque, and wholly human. *nciaja*, a note in verse connected with Shelley's *nci*, would be excellent as a note in prose appended the tragedy, explaining, as it does, why the Pope, clining to pardon Beatrice, was turned aside from purposes of mercy; it rather loses than gains in ue by having been thrown into verse. To recover r loyalty to Browning as a poet, which this volume metimes puts to the test, we might well reserve *mpholeptos* for the close. The pure and disem- ssioned in womanly form is brought face to face th the passionate and sullied lover, to whom her arm is a tyranny; she is no warm sun but a white oon rising above this lost Endymion, who never

[1] See Browning's letter to Mr Kingsland in "Robert Browning" by W. Kingsland (1890), pp. 32, 33.

slumbers but goes forth on hopeless quests at t
bidding of his mistress, and wins for all his rewa
the "sad, slow, silver smile," which is now pity, n
disdain, and never love. The subjugating power
chaste and beautiful superiority to passion over th
mere mortal devotee is absolute and inexorable.
the nymph an abstraction and incarnation of som
thing that may be found in womanhood? Is she
embodiment of the Ideal, which sends out ma
questers, and pities and disdains them when th
return soiled and defeated? Soft and sweet as s
appears, she is *La belle Dame sans merci*, and h
worshipper is as desperately lost as the knight-at-arm
of Keats's poem.

Chapter XV

Solitude and Society

IE volume which consists of *La Saisiaz* and *The wo Poets of Croisic* (1878) brings the work of this cade to a close.[1] *La Saisiaz*, the record of thoughts at were awakened during that solitary clamber to e summit of Salève after the death of Miss Egerton-nith, is not an elegy, but it remains with us as a emorial of friendship. In reading it we discern the l white figure of the "stranger lady," leaning through e terrace wreaths of leaf and bloom, or pacing that w grass-path which she had loved and called her n. It serves Browning's purpose in the poem that e should have been one of those persons who in this rld have not manifested all that lies within them. oes she still exist, or is she now no more than the ng which lies in the little enclosure at Collonge? ie poem after its solemn and impressive prelude comes the record of an hour's debate of the writer ch himself—a debate which has a definite aim and brought to a definite issue. In conducting that bate on immortality, Browning is neither Christian r anti-Christian. The Christian creed involves a estion of history; he cannot here admit historical nsiderations; he will see the matter out as he is an in-

[1] Some parts of what follows on *La Saisiaz* have already appeared in it in a forgotten article of mine on that poem.

dividual soul, on the grounds suggested by his individu consciousness and his personal knowledge. It may l that any result he arrives at is a result for himself alon

But why conduct an argument in verse? Is n prose a fitter medium for such a discussion? Th answer is that the poem is more than an argument; is the record in verse of an experience, the story of pregnant and passionate hour, during which passio quickened the intellect; and the head, while resistin all illusions of the heart, was roused to that resistan by the heart itself. Such an hour is full of events; may be almost epic in its plenitude of action; but th events are ideas. The frame and setting of th discussion also are more than frame and setting; the co-operate with the thoughts; they form part of th experience. The poet is alone among the mountain with dawn and sunset for associates, Jura thrilled gold at sunrise, Salève in its evening rose-bloom, Mon Blanc which strikes greatness small; or at night he beneath the luminous worlds which

> One by one came lamping—chiefly that prepotency of Mars.

While he climbs towards the summit he is aware "Earth's most exquisite disclosures, heaven's own Go in evidence"; he stands face to face with Nature— "rather with Infinitude." All through his mounta ascent the vigour of life is aroused within him; an as he returns—there is her grave.

The idea of a future life, for which this earthly li serves as an education and a test, is so central wit Browning, so largely influences all his feelings ar penetrates all his art, that it is worth while to atten to the course of his argument and the nature of h

onclusion. He puts the naked question to himself—What does death mean? Is it total extinction? Is it passage into life?—without any vagueness, without ny flattering metaphor; he is prepared to accept or ndure any answer if only it be the truth. Whether is discussion leads to a trustworthy result or not, the ncerity and the energy of his endeavour after truth erve to banish all supine and half-hearted moods. he debate, of which his poem is a report, falls into vo parts: first, a statement of facts; secondly, a eries of conjectures—conjectures and no more—rising om the basis of facts that are ascertained. To put ie question, "Shall I survive death?" is to assume iat I exist and that something other than myself xists which causes me now to live and presently to e. The nature of this power outside myself I do ot know; we may for convenience call it "God." eyond these two facts—myself and a power environ- g me—nothing is known with certainty which has ny bearing on the matter in dispute. I am like a oating rush borne onward by a stream; whither orne the rush cannot tell; but rush and stream are cts that cannot be questioned.

Knowing that I exist—Browning goes on—I know hat for me is pain and what is pleasure. And, how- rer it may be with others, for my own part I can ronounce upon the relation of joy to sorrow in this y life on earth:—

> must say—or choke in silence——"Howsoever came my fate,
> orrow did and joy did nowise—life well weighed—preponderate."

this failure be ordained by necessity, I shall bear as best I can; but, if this life be all, nothing shall

force me to say that life has proceeded from a caus supreme in goodness, wisdom, and power. What find here is goodness always intermixed with evi wisdom which means an advance from error to the co fession of ignorance; power that is insufficient to ada a human being to his surroundings even in the degr in which a worm is fitted to the leaf on which it feed

Browning tacitly rejects the idea that the world the work of some blind force; and undoubtedly o reason, which endeavours to reduce all things in natu to rational conceptions, demands that we should co ceive the world as rational rather than as some wi work of chance. Upon one hypothesis, and upon o alone, can the life of man upon this globe appear t result of intelligence:

I have lived then, done and suffered, loved and hated, learnt a taught
This—there is no reconciling wisdom with a world distraught,
Goodness with triumphant evil, power with failure in the aim,
If (to my own sense, remember! though none other feel t same!)
If you bar me from assuming earth to be a pupil's place,
And life, time,—with all their chances, changes,—just probati —space,
Mine for me.

Grant this hypothesis, and all changes from irration to rational, from evil to good, from pain to a strenuo joy:—

Only grant a second life, I acquiesce
In this present life as failure, count misfortune's worst assaults
Triumph, not defeat, assured that loss so much the more exalts
Gain about to be.

Thus out of defeat springs victory; never are we near to knowledge as when we are checked at t

ounds of ignorance ; beauty is felt through its opposite ; ood is known through evil ; truth shows its potency hen it is confronted by falsehood ;

Vhile for love—Oh how but, losing love, does whoso loves succeed y the death-pang to the birth-throe—learning what is love indeed ?

et at best this idea of a future life remains a con-ecture, an hypothesis, a hope, which gives a key to ne mysteries of our troubled earthly state. Browning roceeds to argue that such a hope is all that we can xpect or ought to desire. The absolute assurance of future life and of rewards and punishments conse-uent on our deeds in the present world would defeat ne very end for which, according to the hypothesis, e are placed here ; it would be fatal to the purpose f our present life considered as a state of probation. Vhat such a state of probation requires is precisely what e have—hope ; no less than this and no more. Does ur heaven overcloud because we lack certainty ? No :

ope the arrowy, just as constant, comes to pierce its gloom, compelled
y a power and by a purpose which, if no one else beheld, behold in life, so—hope !

uch is the conclusion with Browning of the whole atter. It is in entire accordance with a letter which e wrote two years previously to a lady who supposed erself to be dying, and who had thanked him for elp derived from his poems : " All the help I can ffer, in my poor degree, is the assurance that I see er *more* reason to hold by the same hope—and that y no means in ignorance of what has been advanced the contrary. . . . God bless you, sustain you, and

receive you." To Dr Moncure Conway, who had lo a son, Browning wrote: "If I, who cannot, woul restore your son, He who can, will." And Mr Rudolp Lehmann records his words in conversation: "I hav doubted and denied it [a future life], and I fear hav even printed my doubts; but now I am as deepl convinced that there is something after death. If yc ask me what, I no more know it than my dog knov who and what I am. He knows that I am there an that is enough for him."[1]

Browning's confession in *La Saisiaz* that the sorro of his life outweighed its joy is not inconsistent wit his habitual cheerfulness of manner. Such estimat as this are little to be trusted. One great shock pain may stand for ever aloof from all other ex periences; the pleasant sensations of many days pa from our memory. We cannot tell. But that Brownin supposed himself able to tell is in itself worthy note. In *The Two Poets of Croisic*, which was writte in London immediately after *La Saisiaz*, and whic though of little intrinsic importance, shows th Browning was capable of a certain grace in ver that is light, he pleads that the power of victorious dealing with pain and transforming it into strengt may be taken as the test of a poet's greatness:

> Yoke Hatred, Crime, Remors
> Despair: but ever 'mid the whirling fear,
> Let, through the tumult, break the poet's face
> Radiant, assured his wild slaves win the race.

This is good counsel for art; but not wholly wi counsel for life. Sorrow, indeed, is not wronged by

[1] "An Artist's Reminiscences," by R. Lehmann (1894), p. 231.

heerfulness cultivated and strenuously maintained; ut gladness does suffer a certain wrong. Sunshine omes and goes; the attempt to substitute any un-lieved light for sunshine is somewhat of a failure at ie best. Shadows and brightness pursuing each ther according to the course of nature make more for enuine happiness than does any stream of moral ectricity worked from a dynamo of the will. It is easanter to encounter a breeze that sinks and swells, at lingers and hastens, than to face a vigorous and stained gale even of a tonic quality. Browning's nfailing cheer and cordiality of manner were admir-ble; they were in part spontaneous, in part an ceptance of duty, in part a mode of self-protection; ey were only less excellent than the varying moods a simple and beautiful nature.

When *La Saisiaz* appeared Browning was sixty-six ars old. He lived for more than eleven years nger, during which period he published six volumes verse, showing new powers as a writer of brief poetic rrative and as a teacher through parables; but he oduced no single work of prolonged and sustained fort—which perhaps was well. His physical vigour ntinued for long unabated. He still enjoyed the rious pleasures and excitements of the London ason; but it is noted by Mrs Orr that after the ath of Miss Egerton-Smith he "almost mechanically nounced all the musical entertainments to which she d so regularly accompanied him." His daily habits ere of the utmost regularity, varying hardly at all om week to week. He was averse, says Mrs Orr, o every thought of change," and chose rather to lapt himself to external conditions than to enter on

the effort of altering them; "what he had done once he was wont, for that very reason, to continue doing." A few days after Browning's death a journalist obtained from a photographer, Mr Grove, who had formerly been for seven years in Browning's service the particulars as to how an ordinary day during the London season went by at Warwick Crescent. Browning rose without fail at seven, enjoyed a plate of whatever fruit—strawberries, grapes, oranges—were in season; read, generally some piece of foreign literature, for an hour in his bedroom; then bathed breakfasted—a light meal of twenty minutes; sat by the fire and read his *Times* and *Daily News* till ten from ten to one wrote in his study or meditated with head resting on his hand. To write a letter was the reverse of a pleasure to him, yet he was diligent in replying to a multitude of correspondents. His lunch at one, was of the lightest kind, usually no more than a pudding. Visits, private views of picture exhibitions and the like followed until half-past five. At seven he dined, preferring Carlowitz or claret to other wines and drinking little of any. But on many days the dinner was not at home; once during three successive weeks he dined out without the omission of a day. He returned home seldom at a later hour than half past twelve; and at seven next morning the round began again. During his elder years, says Mr Grove he took little interest in politics. He was not often a church-goer, but discussed religious matters earnestly with his clerical friends. He loved not only animals but flowers, and when once a Virginia creeper entered the study window at Warwick Crescent, it was not expelled but trained inside the room. To hi

servants he was a considerate friend rather than a master.

So far Mr Grove as reported in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (Dec 16, 1889).

Many persons have attempted to describe Browning as he appeared in society; there is a consensus of opinion as to the energy and cordiality of his way of social converse; but it is singular that, though some records of his out-pourings as a talker exist, very little is on record that possesses permanent value. Perhaps the best word that can be quoted is that remembered by Sir James Paget—Browning's recommendation of Bach's "Crucifixus—et sepultus—et resurrexit" as a cure for want of belief. He did not fling such pointed shafts as those of Johnson which still hang and almost quiver where they struck. His energy did not gather itself up into sentences but flowed—and sometimes foamed—in a tide. Cordial as he was, he could be also vehemently intolerant, and sometimes perhaps where his acquaintance with the subject of his discourse was not sufficient to warrant a decided opinion.[1] He appeared, says his biographer, more widely sympathetic in his works than in his life"; with no moral selfishness he was, adds Mrs Orr, intellectually self-centred; and unquestionably the statement is correct. He could suffer fools, but not always gladly. Speaking of earlier days in Italy, T. A. Trollope observes that, while he was never rough or discourteous even to the most exasperating fool, the men used to be rather afraid of Browning." His cordiality was not insincere; but it belonged to his

[1] Thus he declaimed to Robert Buchanan against Walt Whitman's writings, with which, according to Buchanan, he had little acquaintance.

outer, not his inner self. With the exception o Milsand, he appears to have admitted no man to hi heart, though he gave a portion of his intellect t many. His friends, in the more intimate sense of th word, were women, towards whom his feeling was tha of comradeship and fraternal affection without over much condescension or any specially chivalric sen timent. When early in their acquaintance Mis Barrett promised Browning that he would find he "an honest man on the whole," she understood he correspondent, who valued a good comrade of th other sex, and had at the same time a vivid sense o the fact that such a comrade was not so unfortunat as to be really a man.

Let witnesses be cited and each give his fragment o evidence. Mr W. J. Stillman, an excellent observer, wa specially impressed in his intercourse with Browning by the mental health and robustness of a nature soun to the core; "an almost unlimited intellectual vitality and an individuality which nothing could infringe or but which a singular sensitiveness towards others pre vented from ever wounding even the most morbi sensibility; a strong man armed in the completes defensive armour, but with no aggressiveness."[1] writer in the first volume of *The New Review* described Browning as a talker in general societ so faithfully that it is impossible to improve on wha he has said: "It may safely be alleged," he write "that no one meeting Mr Browning for the first tim and unfurnished with a clue, would guess his vocatio He might be a diplomatist, a statesman, a discovere or a man of science. But, whatever were his callin

[1] "Autobiography of a Journalist," ii. 210.

re should feel that it must be essentially practical. . . . His conversation corresponds to his appearance. It bounds in vigour, in fire, in vivacity. Yet all the me it is entirely free from mystery, vagueness, or echnical jargon. It is the crisp, emphatic and power-ul discourse of a man of the world, who is incomparably etter informed than the mass of his congeners. Mr Browning is the readiest, the blithest, and the most orcible of talkers. Like the Monsignore in *Lothair* e can 'sparkle with anecdote and blaze with repartee,' nd when he deals in criticism the edge of his sword mercilessly whetted against pretension and vanity. he inflection of his voice, the flash of his eye, the ose of his head, the action of his hand, all lend their ecial emphasis to the condemnation." The mental uality which most impressed Mr W. M. Rossetti in is communications with Browning was, he says, celerity"—"whatever he had to consider or speak bout, he disposed of in the most forthright tyle." His method was of the greatest directness; every touch told, every nail was hit on the head." He was not a sustained, continuous speaker, nor ex-ctly a brilliant one; "but he said something pleasant nd pointed on whatever turned up; . . . one felt is mind to be extraordinarily rich, while his facility, ccessibility, and *bonhomie*, softened but did not by ny means disguise the sense of his power."[1] Brown-ng's discourse with a single person who was a favoured cquaintance was, Mr Gosse declares, "a very much ner phenomenon than when a group surrounded him." hen "his talk assumed the volume and the tumult

[1] From the first of three valuable articles by Mr Rossetti in *The agazine of Art* (1890) on "Portraits of Robert Browning."

of a cascade. His voice rose to a shout, sank to a whisper, ran up and down the gamut of conversational melody. . . . In his own study or drawing-room what he loved was to capture the visitor in a low arm-chair's "sofa-lap of leather," and from a most unfair vantage of height to tyrannize, to walk round the victim, in front, behind, on this side, on that, weaving magic circles, now with gesticulating arms thrown high, now grovelling on the floor to find some reference in a folio, talking all the while, a redundant turmoil of thoughts, fancies, and reminiscences flowing from those generous lips." [1]

Mr Henry James in his "Life of Story" [2] is less pictorial, but he is characteristically subtle in his rendering of the facts. He brings us back, however, to Browning as seen in society. He speaks of the Italian as a comparatively idyllic period which seemed to be "built out," though this was not really the case by the brilliant London period. It was, he says, as if Browning had divided his personal consciousness into two independent compartments. The man of the world "walked abroad, showed himself, talked, right resonantly, abounded, multiplied his connections, did his duty." The poet—an inscrutable personage—"sat at home and knew, as well he might, in what quarters of *that* sphere to look for suitable company. "The poet and the 'member of society' were, in a word, dissociated in him as they can rarely elsewhere have been. . . . The wall that built out the idyll (as we call it for convenience) of which memory and imagination were virtually composed for him, stood

[1] Robert Browning, "Personalia," by Edmund Gosse, pp. 81, 82.
[2] Vol. ii. pp. 88, 89.

ere behind him solidly enough, but subject to his rivilege of living almost equally on both sides of it. : contained an invisible door, through which, working ne lock at will, he could softly pass, and of which he ept the golden key—carrying about the same with im even in the pocket of his dinner waistcoat, yet ven in his most splendid expansions showing it, happy nan, to none." Tennyson, said an acquaintance of Miss Anna Swanwick, "hides himself behind his aurels, Browning behind the man of the world." he declares that her experience was more fortunate; nat she seldom heard Browning speak without feeling hat she was listening to the poet, and that on more han one occasion he spoke to her of his wife.[1] But nany witnesses confirm the impression which is so appily put into words by Mr Henry James. The member of society" protected the privacy of the poet. The questions remain whether the poet did not suffer rom such protection; whether, beside the superfluous orces which might be advantageously disposed of at he drawing-board or in thumping wet clay, some of he forces proper to the poet were not drawn away nd dissipated by the incessant demands of Society; whether while a sufficient fund of energy for the louble life was present with Browning, the peculiar nergy of the poet did not undergo a certain deteriora- ion. The doctrine of the superiority of the heart to he intellect is more and more preached in Browning's oetry; but the doctrine itself is an act of the intellect. The poet need not perhaps insist on the doctrine if he reates—as Browning did in earlier years—beautiful

[1] Anna Swanwick, "A Memoir by Mary L. Bruce," pp. 130, 131. To Dr Furnivall he often spoke of Mrs Browning.

things which commend themselves, without a preacher to our love.

In the autumn of 1878, after seventeen years of absence from Italy, Browning was recaptured by its charm, and henceforward to the close of his life Venice and the Venetian district became his accustomed place of summer refreshment and repose. For a time, with his sister as his companion, he paused at a hotel near the summit of the Splügen, enjoyed the mountain air, walked vigorously, and wrote, with great rapidity, says Mrs Orr, his poem of Russia, *Ivàn Ivànovitch*. When a boy he had read in Bunyan's "Life and Death of Mr Badman" the story of "Old Tod," and with this still vivid in his memory, he added to his Russian tale the highly unidyllic "idyl" of English life, *Ned Bratts*. It was thus that subjects for poems suddenly presented themselves to Browning, often rising up as it were spontaneously out of the remote past. "There comes up unexpectedly," he wrote in a letter to a friend, "some subject for poetry, which has been dormant and apparently dead, for perhaps dozens of years. A month since I wrote a poem of some two hundred lines ['Donald'] about a story I heard more than forty years ago, and never dreamed of trying to repeat, wondering how it had so long escaped me; and so it has been with my best things."[1] Before the close of September the travellers were in a rough but pleasant albergo at Asolo, which Browning had not seen since his first Italian journey more than forty years previously. "Such things," he writes, "have begun and ended with me in the interval!" Changes had taken

[1] From Mrs Bronson's article in *The Century Magazine*, "Browning in Venice."

lace in the little city; yet much seemed familiar and herefore the more dreamlike. The place had indeed aunted him in his dreams; he would find himself ravelling with a friend, or some mysterious stranger, when suddenly the little town sparkling in the sunhine would rise before him. "Look! look there is Asolo," he would cry, "do let us go there!" And lways, after the way of dreams, his companions would eclare it impossible and he would be hurried away.[1] From the time that he actually saw again the city hat he loved this recurring dream was to come no nore. He wandered through the well-known places, nd seeking for an echo in the Rocca, the ruined ortress above the town, he found that it had not lost ts tongue. A fortnight at Venice in a hotel where uiet and coolness were the chief attractions, prepared he way for many subsequent visits to what he afterards called "the dearest place in the world." Everyhing in Venice, says Mrs Bronson, charmed him: He found grace and beauty in the *popolo* whom he aints so well in the Goldoni sonnet. The poorest treet children were pretty in his eyes. He would dmire a carpenter or a painter, who chanced to be at ork in the house, and say to me 'See the fine poise f the head . . . those well-cut features. You might ancy that man in the crimson robe of a Senator as ou see them in Tintoret's canvas.'"

But these are reminiscences of later days. It was n 1880 that Browning made the acquaintance of is American friend Mrs Arthur Bronson, whose kind ospitalities added to the happiness of his visits to

[1] Related more fully in Mrs Bronson's article "Browning in Asolo" in *The Century Magazine.*

Asolo and to Venice, who received, as if it were a farewell gift, the dedication of his last volume, and who, not long before her death in 1901, published interesting articles on "Browning in Asolo" and "Browning in Venice" in *The Century Magazine*. The only years in which he did not revisit Venice were 1882, 1884 and 1886, and in each of these years his absence was occasioned by some unforeseen mishap or adventure. In 1882 the floods were out, and he proceeded no farther than Verona. Could he have overcome the obstacles and reached Venice, he feared that he might have been incapable of enjoying it. For the first time in his life he was lamed by what he took for an attack of rheumatism, "caught," he says, "just before leaving St Pierre de Chartreuse, through my stupid inadvertence in sitting with a window open at my back—reading the Iliad, all my excuse!—while clad in a thin summer suit, and snow on the hills and bitterness everywhere."[1] In 1884 his sister's illness at first forbade travel to so considerable a distance. The two companions were received by another American friend, Mrs Bloomfield Moore, at the Villa Berry, St Moritz, and when she was summoned across the Atlantic, at her request they continued to occupy her villa. The season was past; the place deserted, but the sun shone gloriously. "We have walked every day," Browning wrote at the end of September, "morning and evening—afternoon I should say—two or three hours each excursion, the delicious mountain air surpassing any I was ever privileged to breathe. My sister is absolutely herself again, and something over: I was hardly in want of such doctor

[1] Mrs Bronson's "Browning in Venice" in *The Century Magazine*.

ng."[1] Two years later Miss Browning was ailing again, nd they did not venture farther than Wales. At the Hand Hotel, Llangollen, they were at no great distance rom Brintysilio, the summer residence of their friends Sir Theodore and Lady Martin—in earlier days the Lady Carlisle and Colombe of Browning's plays.[2] Mrs Orr otices that Browning, Liberal as he declared himself, vas now very favourably impressed by the services to ociety of the English country gentleman. "Talk of bolishing that class of men!" he exclaimed, "they re the salt of the earth!" She adds, as worthy of emark, that he attended regularly the afternoon Sunday service in the parish church at Llantysilio, where now a tablet of Lady Martin's placing marks he spot. Churchgoing was not his practice in London; "but I do not think," says Mrs Orr, "he ver failed in it at the Universities or in the country." At Venice it was his custom to be present with his ister at the services of a Waldensian chapel, where a certain eloquent pastor," as Mrs Bronson describes im, was the preacher. A year before his death Browning in a letter to Lady Martin recalls the appy season in the Vale of Llangollen—"delightful veeks—each tipped with a sweet starry Sunday at the ittle church leading to the House Beautiful where we ook our rest of an evening spent always memorably."

Before passing on to Venice, where repose was ningled with excitement, Browning was accustomed o seek a renewal of physical energy, after the fatigues f London, in some place not too much haunted by

[1] To Dr Furnivall, Sept. 28, 1884.

[2] Some notices of Browning in Wales occur in Sir T. Martin's "Life of Lady Martin."

the English tourist, where he could walk for hours i
the clear mountain air. In 1881 and 1882 it was S
Pierre de Chartreuse, from which he visited the Grand
Chartreuse, and heard the midnight mass; in 188
and 1885 it was Gressoney St Jean in the Val d'Aost
—the "delightful Gressoney" of the Prologue t
Ferishtah's Fancies, where "eggs, milk, cheese, fruit
sufficed "for gormandizing"; in 1888 it was the ye
more beautiful Primiero, near Feltre. In the previou
year he had, for the second time, stayed at St Moritz
These were seasons of abounding life. St Pierre wa
only "a wild little clump of cottages on a mountai
amid loftier mountains," with the roughest of little inn
for its hotel; but its primitive arrangements suite
Browning well and were bravely borne by his sister
From Gressoney in September 1885 he wrote: "W
are all but alone, the brief 'season' being over, an
only a chance traveller turning up for a fortnight'
lodging. We take our walks in the old way; two an
a half hours before breakfast, three after it, in th
most beautiful country I know. Yesterday the thre
hours passed without our meeting a single man
woman, or child; one man only was discovered at
distance at the foot of a mountain we had climbed."
All things pleased him; an August snowstorm at S
Moritz was made amends for by "the magnificence o
the mountain and its firs black against the universa
white"; it served moreover as an illustration of
passage in the Iliad, the only book that accompanie
him from England: "The days glide away uneventfully
nearly, and I breathe in the pleasant idleness at ever

[1] Letter to Dr Furnivall, August 29, 1881.
[2] To Dr Furnivall, Sept. 7, 1885.

re. I have no few acquaintances here—nay, some d friends—but my intimates are the firs on the hill-de, and the myriad butterflies all about it, every ight wing of them under the snow to-day, which ight not to have been for a fortnight yet."[1] And om Primiero in 1888, when his strength had con-derably declined, a letter tells of unabated pleasure; mountains "which morning and evening, in turn, ansmute literally to gold," with at times a silver ange; of the valley "one green luxuriance"; of the ger-lilies in the garden above ten feet high, every oom and every leaf faultless; and of the captive x, "most engaging of little vixens," who, to Browning's eat joy, broke her chain and escaped.[2] As each ccessive volume that he published seemed to him s best, so of his mountain places of abode the st always was the loveliest.

At Venice for a time the quiet Albergo dell' niverso suited Browning and his sister well, but nen Mrs Bronson pressed them to accept the use a suite of rooms in the Palazzo Giustiniani Re-nati and the kind offer was accepted, the gain was nsiderable; and the Palazzo has historical associa-ons dating from the fifteenth century which pleased owning's imagination. It was his habit to rise early, d after a light breakfast to visit the Public Gardens th his sister. He had many friends—Mrs Bronson our informant—whose wants or wishes he bore in ind—the prisoned elephant, the baboon, the kangaroo, e marmosets, the pelicans, the ostrich; three times,

[1] To Dr Furnivall, August 21, 1887.

[2] See for fuller details the letter in Mrs Orr's *Life of Browning*, p. 407, 8.

with strict punctuality, he made his rounds, and the returned to his apartment. At noon appeared th second and more substantial breakfast, at which Italia dishes were preferred. Browning wrote passionatel against the vivisection of animals, and strenuousl declaimed against the decoration of a lady's hat wit the spoils of birds—

> Clothed with murder of His best
> Of harmless beings.

He praised God—for pleasure as he teaches us i praise—by heartily enjoying ortolans, "a doze luscious lumps" provided by the cook of th Giustiniani-Recanati palace; to vary his own phrasin he was

> Fed with murder of His best
> Of harmless beings,

and laughed, innocently enough, with his good sist over the delicious "mouthfuls for cardinals."[1] As the pleasure of the eye in beauty gained at a bird expense were more criminal than the gusto of th tongue in lusciousness, curbed by piquancy, gained the expense of a dozen other birds! At three o'cloc came the gondola, and it was often directed to th Lido. "I walk, even in wind and rain, for a coup of hours on Lido," Browning wrote when near seventy, "and enjoy the break of sea on the strip sand as much as Shelley did in those old days." And to another friend: "You don't know how a solutely well I am after my walking, not on th mountains merely, but on the beloved Lido. Go the

[1] So described by Mrs Bronson. [2] To Dr Furnivall, Oct. 11, 188

only to stand and be blown about by the sea wind."[1] t one time he even talked of completing an unfinished la on the Lido from which "the divine sunsets" uld be seen, but the dream-villa faded after the anner of such dreams. Sunsets, however, and sun-es never faded from Browning's brain. "I will not aise a cloud however bright," says Wordsworth, hough no one has praised them more ardently than . From Pippa's sunrise to the sunrises of mornings nen his life drew towards its close, Browning lavished s praise upon the scenery of the sky. A passage oted by Mrs Orr from a letter written a little more an a year before his death is steeped in colour; when *ippa Passes* becomes the prey of the annotating itor it will illuminate his page: "Every morning at x I see the sun rise. . . . My bedroom window mmands a perfect view: the still, grey lagune, the w sea-gulls flying, the islet of S. Giorgio in deep adow, and the clouds in a long purple rack, behind hich a sort of spirit of rose burns up till presently l the rims are on fire with gold, and last of all the b sends before it a long column of its own essence parently: so my day begins." The sea-gulls of hich this extract speaks were, Mrs Bronson tells us, special delight to Browning. On a day of gales ne would stand at the window and watch them as ey sailed to and fro, a sure sign of heavy storms in e Adriatic." To him, as he declared, they were en more interesting than the doves of St Mark.

Sometimes his walks, guided by Mrs Bronson's aughter, "the best cicerone in the world," he said, were rough the narrowest by-streets of the city, where he

[1] Quoted by Mrs Bronson.

rejoiced in the discovery, or what he supposed to
discovery, of some neglected stone of Venice. Occ
sionally he examined curiously the monuments of t
churches. His American friend tells at length t
story of a search in the Church of San Niccolò for t
tomb of the chieftain Salinguerra of Browning's ov
Sordello. At times he entered the bric-a-brac sho
and made a purchase of some piece of old furniture
tapestry. His rule "never to buy anything witho
knowing exactly what he wished to do with it" mu
have been interpreted liberally, for when about to mo
in June 1887 from Warwick Crescent to De Ve
Gardens many treasures acquired in Italy were, M
Orr tells us, stowed away in the house which he w
on the point of leaving. And the latest bibelot w
always the most enchanting: "Like a child with
new toy," says Mrs Bronson, "he would carry it hi
self (size and weight permitting) into the gondo
rejoice over his chance in finding it, and desca
eloquently upon its intrinsic merits." Thus, or with h
son's assistance, came to De Vere Gardens brass lam
that had hung in Venetian chapels, the silver Jewi
"Sabbath lamp," and the "four little heads"—t
seasons—after which, Browning declared, he would n
buy another thing for the house.[1] Returning from h
walks on the Lido or wanderings through the lit
calli, he showed that unwise half-disdain, which an u
enlightened masculine Herakles might have shown, f
the blessedness of five o'clock tea. At dinner he w
in his toilet what Mr Henry James calls the "memb
of society," never the poet whose necktie is a dith
ramb. Good sense was his habit if not his foib

[1] Mrs Orr, "Life of Browning," p. 400.

nd why should we deny ourselves here the pleasure
imagining Miss Browning at these pleasant cere-
onies, as Mrs Bronson describes her, wearing "beautiful
owns of rich and sombre tints, and appearing each
ay in a different and most dainty French cap and
uaint antique jewels"? If other guests were not
resent, sometimes a visit to the theatre followed.
he Venetian comedies of Gallina especially pleased
rowning; he went to his spacious box at the Goldoni
vening after evening, and did not fail to express his
anks to his "brother dramatist" for the enjoyment
e had received. In his *Toccata of Galuppi* he had
xpressed the melancholy which underlies the transitory
aiety of eighteenth-century life in Venice; but he
ould also remember its innocent gladnesses without this
ense of melancholy. When in 1883 the committee
f the Goldoni monument asked Browning to contribute
poem to their Album he immediately complied with
ne request. It was "scribbled off," according to
Irs Orr, while Professor Molmenti's messenger was
aiting; it was ready the day after the request reached
im, says Mrs Bronson, and was probably "carefully
nought out before he put pen to paper." It catches,
n the happiest temper, the spirit of Goldoni's sunniest
lays:

> There throng the People: how they come and go,
> Lisp the soft language, flaunt the bright garb—see—
> On Piazza, Calle, under Portico
> And over Bridge! Dear King of Comedy,
> Be honoured! Thou that didst love Venice so,
> Venice, and we who love her, all love thee!

The brightness and lightness of southern life soothed
Browning's northern strenuousness of mood. He would

enumerate of a morning the crimes of "the wicked city" as revealed by the reports of the public press—gondolier's oars had been conveyed away, a piece linen a-dry had corrupted the virtue of some ligh fingered Autolycus of the canals![1] Yet all the whi much of his heart remained with his native land. H could not be happy without his London daily pape Mrs Orr tells us how deeply interested he was in th fortunes of the British expedition for the relief General Gordon.

In 1885 Browning's son for the first time since h childhood was in Italy. With Venice he was in h father's phrase "simply infatuated." For his son's sak but also with the thought of a place of retreat whe perhaps years should bring with them feebleness body, Browning entered into treaty with the owner, a Austrian and an absentee, for the purchase of th Manzoni Palazzo on the Grand Canal. He considere it the most beautiful house in Venice. Ruskin ha described it in the "Stones of Venice" as "a perfe and very rich example of Byzantine Renaissance." wholly captured the imagination of Browning. He n only already possessed it in his dream, but was bu opening new windows to admit the morning sunshin and throwing out balconies, while leaving undisturbe the rich façade with its medallions in coloured marb The dream was never realised. The vendor, Marche Montecucculi, hoping to secure a higher price, dre back. Browning was about to force him by legal pr ceedings to fulfil his bargain, when it was discover that the walls were cracked and the foundations we untrustworthy. To his great mortification the who

[1] Mrs Bronson records this.

ıeme had to be abandoned. It was not until his n in 1888, the year after his marriage, acquired ssession of the Palazzo Rezzonico—"a stately temple tthe rococo" is Mr Henry James's best word for it—ıt Browning ceased to think with regret of the lost anzoni. At no time, however, did he design a voluny abandonment of his life in England. When in l expectation of becoming the owner of the Palazzo anzoni he wrote to Dr Furnivall: "Don't think I :an to give up London till it warns me away; when e hospitalities and innumerable delights grow a rden. . . . Pen will have sunshine and beauty about m, and every help to profit by these, while I and my ter have secured a shelter when the fogs of life grow o troublesome."

Chapter XVI

Poet and Teacher in Old Age

DURING the last decade of his life Browning's influen as a literary power was assured. The publicati indeed of *The Ring and the Book* in 1868 did mu to establish his reputation with those readers who a not watchers for a new planet but revise their astr nomical charts upon authority. He noted with sati faction that fourteen hundred copies of *Prin Hohenstiel-Schwangau* were sold in five days, a says of *Balaustion's Adventure* "2500 in five mont is a good sale for the likes of me." The later volum were not perhaps more popular, but they sent reade to the earlier poems, and successive volumes of Sele tions made these easily accessible. That published Moxon in 1865, and dedicated in words of admirati and friendship to Tennyson, by no means equalled value the earlier Selections made by John Forster. T volume of 1872—dedicated also to Tennyson—whi has been frequently reprinted, was arranged upon principle, the reference of which to the poems chos is far from clear—"by simply stringing together certa pieces"; Browning wrote, "on the thread of an imagi ary personality, I present them in succession, rath as the natural development of a particular experien than because I account them the most noteworth portion of my work." We can perceive that so

oems of love are brought together, and some of art, nd that the series closes with poems of religious thought · experience, but such an order is not strictly observed, nd the "imaginary personality"—the thread—seems · be imaginary in the fullest sense of the word. Yet is of interest to observe that something of a psycho-gical-dramatic arrangement was at least designed. second series of Selections followed in 1880. Brown-g was accepted by many admirers not only as a poet ut as a prophet. "Tennyson and I seem now to be garded as the two kings of Brentford," he said ughingly in 1879.[1] The later-enthroned king was oon to have an interesting court. In 1881 The rowning Society, founded by Dr Furnivall—initiator so much work that is invaluable to the student of ur literature—and Miss E. H. Hickey, herself a poet, egan its course. At first, according to Mrs Orr, rowning "treated the project as a joke," but when nce he understood it to be serious, "he did not oppose ." He felt, however, that before the public he must and aloof from its work: "as Wilkes was no Wilkeite," e wrote to Edmund Yates, "I am quite other than a rowningite." With a little nervousness as to the iscretion which the Society might or might not show, e felt grateful for the interest in his writings demon-rated by persons many of whom had been unknown o him even by name. He was always ready to furnish r Furnivall with a note of facts or elucidation. His ld admirers had made him somewhat too much of peculiar and private possession. A propaganda of ounger believers could not be unwelcome to one ho had for so many years been commonly regarded

[1] Mr Gosse: "Dictionary of National Biography," Supplement, i. 317.

as an obscure heretic—not even an heresiarch—
literature.

Other honours accompanied his old age. In 188
he received the LL.D. of the University of Edinburg
and again declined to be nominated for the Lo
Rectorship of the University of St Andrews. Ne
year he accepted the Honorary Presidency of the Fi
Associated Societies of Edinburgh. In 1886
was appointed Foreign Correspondent to the Roy
Academy, a sinecure post rendered vacant by t
death of Lord Houghton. Though so vigorous
talk, Browning could not make a public speech,
he shrank from such an effort; none of the honou
which he accepted were such as to put him to this te
During many years he was President of the Ne
Shakspere Society. His veneration for Shakespea
is expressed in a sonnet entitled *The Names*, writt
for the Book of the Show held in the Albert Ha
May 1884, on behalf of the Fulham Road Hospit
for Women; it was not included in the edition of
works which he was superintending during the la
two years of his life. Browning was not whol
uninterested in the attempts made to transfer t
glory of the Shakespearian drama to Bacon;
agreed with Spedding that whatever else might
a matter of doubt, it was certain that the author
the "Essays" could not have been the author of t
plays. On another question it is perhaps worth recor
ing his opinion—he could see nothing of Shakespea
he declared, in the tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*.

In 1879 appeared *Dramatic Idyls* and in t
following year *Dramatic Idyls, Second Series*. Th
differed in two respects from the volumes of m

llaneous poetry which Browning had previously ublished. Hitherto the contents of his collections of erse in the main fell into three groups—poems which ere interpretations of the passion of love, poems which ealt with art and artists, poems which were inspired v the ideas and emotions of religion. Unless we gard *Ned Bratts* as a poem of religious experience, e may say that these themes are wholly absent from ie *Dramatic Idyls*. Secondly, the short story in verse r the first time becomes predominant, or rather xcludes other forms, and the short story here is in eneral not romantic or fantastic, but what we under- and by the word "realistic." The outward body of ie story is in several instances more built up by umulative details than formerly, which gives it an r of solidity or massiveness, and is less expressed rough a swift selection of things essential. And is may lead a reader to suppose that the story is ore a narrative of external incidents than is actually ie case. In truth, though the "corporal rind" of the arrative bulks upon our view, the poet remains ssentially the psychologist. The narrative interest is ot evenly distributed over the whole as it is in the orks of such a writer as Chaucer, who loves narrative r its own sake. There is ordinarily a crisis, a lmination, a decisive and eventful invasion or out- eak of spiritual passion to which we are led up by l that precedes it. If the poem should be humorous, works up to some humorous point, or surprise. The arrative is in fact a picture that hangs from a nail, nd the nail here is some vivid moment of spiritual xperience, or else some jest which also has its crisis. question sometimes arises as to whether the central

motive is sufficient to bear the elaborate apparatu
for the parts of the poem do not always justi
themselves except by reference to their centre.
the case, for example, of *Doctor* ——, the thesis is th
a bad wife is stronger than death; the jest culminat
at the point where the Devil upon sight of his formi
able spouse flies from the bed's-head of one who
about to die, and thus allows his victim to escape t
imminent death. The question, "Will the jest susta
a poem of such length?" is a fair one, and a goo
natured reader will stretch a point and say that
has not after all been so ill amused, which he mig
also say of an Ingoldsby Legend; but even a goo
natured reader will hardly return to *Doctor* —— wi
pleasure. Chaucer with as thin a jest could ha
made an admirable poem, for the interest would ha
been distributed by his lightness of touch, by h
descriptive power, by slyness, by geniality, by
changeful ripple of enjoyment over the entire pie
With Browning, when we have arrived at the apex
the jest, we are fatigued by the climb, and too mu
out of breath to be capable of laughter. In li
manner few persons except the Browning enthusia
who is not responsible for his fervour, will assert th
either the jest or the frankly cynical moral of *Pie*
of Abano compensates for the jolting in a springle
waggon over a rough road and a long. We make t
acquaintance of a magician who with knowledge uni
spired by love has kicks and cuffs for his reward, a
the acquaintance of an astute Greek, who, at least
his dream of life, imposed upon him by the art of mag
exploits the talents of his friend Pietro, and gains t
prize of his astuteness, having learnt to rule men

e potent spell of "cleverness uncurbed by conscience." he cynicism is only inverted morality, and implies at the writer is the reverse of cynical; but it lacks e attractive sub-acid flavour of a delicate cynicism, hich insinuates its prophylactic virus into our veins, nd the humour of the poem, ascending from stage to age until we reach Pietro's final failure, is cumbrous nd mechanical.

The two series of *Dramatic Idyls* included some conicuous successes. The classical poems *Pheidippides*, *chetlos*, *Pan and Luna*, idyls heroic and mythological, vite us by their beauty to return to them again and gain. Browning's sympathy with gallantry in action, ith self-devotion to a worthy cause, was never more vidly rendered than in the first of these poems. he runner of Athens is a more graceful brother of e Breton sailor who saved a fleet for France; but e vision of majestical Pan in "the cool of a cleft" calts our human heroism into relation with the divine nevolence, and the reward of release from labour is oportionally higher than a holiday with the "belle urore." Victory and then domestic love is the man interpretation of Pan's oracular promise; but e gifts of the gods are better than our hopes and it oves to be victory and death:

> He flung down his shield,
> n like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field
> d Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs through,
> ll in he broke: "Rejoice, we conquer!" Like wine through clay,
> y in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss!

The companion poem of Marathon, the story of the meless clown, the mysterious holder of the ploughare, is not less inspiring. The unknown champion,

so plain in his heroic magnitude of mind, so brilliant as he flashes in the van, in the rear, is like the incarnated genius of the soil, which hides itself in the furrow and flashes into the harvest; and it is his glory to be obscured for ever by his deed—"the great deed ne'er grows small." Browning's development of the Vergilian myth—"si credere dignum est"—of Pan and Luna astonishes by its vehement sensuousness and its frank chastity; and while the beauty of the Girl-moon and the terror of her betrayal are realised with the utmost energy of imagination, we are made to feel that all which happens is the transaction of a significant dream or legend.

In contrast with these classical pieces, *Halbert and Hob* reads like a fragment from some Scandinavian saga telling of the life of forlorn and monstrous creatures, cave-dwellers, who are less men than beasts. Yet father and son are indeed men; the remorse which checks the last outrage against paternity is the touch of the finger of God upon human hearts; and though old Halbert sits dead,

> With an outburst blackening still the old bad fighting face,

and young Hob henceforth goes tottering, muttering, mumbling with a mindless docility, they are, like Browning's men of the Paris morgue, only "apparent failures"; there was in them that spark of divine illumination which can never be wholly extinguished. Positive misdeeds, the presence of a wild crew of evil passions, do not suffice to make Browning's faith or hope falter. It is the absence of human virtue which appals him; if the salt have lost its savour wherewith shall it be salted? This it is which condemns to a

swift, and what the poem represents as a just, abolishment from earth the mother who in *Iván Ivánovitch* has given her children to the wolves, and has thereby proved the complete nullity of her womanhood. For her there is no possible redemption; she must cease to cumber the ground. Iván acts merely as the instinctive doomsman of Nature or of God, and the old village pope, who, as the veil of life grows thin, is feeling after the law above human law, justifies the wielder of the axe, which has been no instrument of vengeance but simply an exponent of the wholesome vitality of earth. The objection that carpenters and joiners, who assume the Heraklean task of purging the earth of monsters, must be prepared to undergo a period of confinement at the pleasure of the Czar in a Criminal Lunatic Asylum is highly sensible, and wholly inappropriate, belonging, as it does, to a plane of thought and feeling other than that in which the poem moves. But perhaps it is not a defect of feeling to fail in admiration of that admired final tableau in which the formidable carpenter is discovered building a toy Kremlin for his five children. We can take for granted that the excellent homicide, having done so simple a bit of the day's work as that of decapitating a fellow-creature, proceeds tranquilly to other innocent pleasures and duties; we do not require the ostentatious theatrical group, with moonlight effects on the Kremlin and the honey-coloured beard, displayed for our benefit just before the curtain is rung down.[1]

[1] Of the mother in this poem, a writer in the "Browning Society's Papers," Miss E. D. West, said justly: "There is discernible in her no guilt which could be cleansed from guilt by any purgatorial process. . . . Her fault had not been moral, had not been sin, to be punished by pain inflicted on the soul; it was merely the uncounteracted primary instinct of

Martin Relph is a story of life-long remorse, se
condemnation and self-denunciation; there is som
thing approaching the supernatural, and yet terrib
real, in the figure of the strange old man with a bea
as white as snow, standing, on a bright May day,
monumental grief, and exposing his ulcerated heart
the spectators who form for him a kind of posterit
One instant's failure in the probation of life, o
momentary syncope of his better nature long yea
ago, has condemned his whole after-existence to b
come a climbing of the purgatorial mount, with a
agony of pain annually renewed at the season whe
the earth rejoices. Only a high-strung delicate spir
is capable of such a perennial passion of penitenc
Ned Bratts may be described as a companion, but
contrasted piece. It is a story of sudden conversio
and of penitence taking an immediate and high
effective form. The humour of the poem, which
excellent of its kind, resembles more the humour
Rowlandson than that of Hogarth. The Bedfo
Court House on the sweltering Midsummer Day, t
Puritan recusants, reeking of piety and the cow-hou
conventicle, the Judges at high jinks upon the ben
—to whom, all in a muck-sweat and ablaze with t
fervour of conversion, enter Black Ned, the sto
publican, and big Tab, his slut of a wife,—these a
drawn after the broad British style of humoro
illustration, which combines a frank exaggeration
the characteristic lines with, at times, a certain gra
in deformity. Here at least is downright belief in t

self-preservation, and as such it is fitliest dealt with by the simple depr
ing her, without further penalty, of the very life which she had secured
herself at so horrible a cost."

nvisible, here is genuine conviction driven home by he Spirit of God and the terror of hell-fire. Black Ned and the slut Tabby as yet may not seem the nost suitable additions to the company of the blessed who move singing

In solemn troops and sweet societies;

ut when a pair of lusty sinners desire nothing so nuch as to be hanged, and that forthwith, we may ake it that they are resolved, as "Christmas" was, to uit the City of Destruction; and the saints above ave learnt not to be fastidious as they bend over epentant rogues. Thanks to the grace of God and ohn Bunyan's book, husband and wife triumphantly spire to and attain the gallows; "they were lovely and leasant in their lives, and in their death they were ot divided." A wise economy of spiritual force!— or while their effectual calling cannot be gainsaid, the nal perseverance of these interesting converts, had ney lingered on the pilgrims' way, as Ned is painfully ware, might have been less of a certainty.

Browning's method as a story-teller may be studied ith special advantage in *Clive*. The circumstances nder which the tale is related have to be caught at y the reader, which quickens his attention and keeps im on the alert; this device is, of course, not in itself ifficult, but to employ it with success is an achievement equiring skill; it is a device proper to the dramatic r quasi-dramatic form; the speaker, who is by no leans a Clive, has to betray something of his own haracter, and at the same time to set forth the character f the hero of his tale; the narrative must tend to a oment of culmination, a crisis; and that this should

involve a paradox—Clive's fear, in the present instance being not that the antagonist's pistol, presented at his head, should be discharged but rather that it should be remorsefully or contemptuously flung away—gives the poet an opportunity for some subtle or some passionate casuistry. The effect of the whole is that of a stream or a shock from an electric battery of mind, for which the story serves as a conductor. It is not a simple but a highly complex species of narrative. In *Muléykeh* one of the most delightful of Browning's later poems uniting, as it does, the poetry of the rapture of swift motion with the poetry of high-hearted passion, the narrative leads up to a supreme moment, and this resolves itself through a paradox of the heart. Shall Hóseyn recover his stolen Pearl of a steed, but recover her dishonoured in the race, or abandon her to the captor with her glory untarnished? It is he himself who betrays himself to loss and grief, for to perfect love, pride in the supremacy of the beloved is more than possession; and thus as Clive's fear was courage as Ivàn's violation of law was obedience to law, so Hóseyn's loss is Hóseyn's gain. In each case Browning's casuistry is not argumentative; it lies in an appeal to some passion or some intuition that is above our common levels of passion or of insight, and his power of uplifting his reader for even a moment into this higher mood is his special gift as a poet. We can return safely enough to the common ground, but we return with a possession which instructs the heart.

A mood of acquiescence, which does not displace the moods of aspiration and of combat but rather floats above them as an atmosphere, was growing familiar to Browning in these his elder years. He had

ought for truth, and had now found all that earth was likely to yield him, of which not the least important part was a conviction that much of our supposed knowledge ends in a perception of our ignorance. He was now disposed to accept what seemed to be the providential order that truth and error should mingle in our earthly life, that truth should be served by illusion; he would not rearrange the disposition of things if he could. He was inclined to hold by the simple certainties of our present life and to be content with these as provisional truths, or as temporary illusions which lead on towards the truth. In the *Pisgah Sights* of the *Pacchiarotto* volume he had imagined this mood of acquiescence as belonging to the hour of death. But old age in reality is an earlier stage in the process of dying, and with all his ardour and his energy, Browning was being detached from the contentions and from some of the hopes and aspirations of life. And because he was detached he could take the world to his heart, though in a different temper from that of youth or middle age; he could admit his view to things that are near, because their claim upon his passions had diminished while their claim upon his tenderness had increased. He could smile amiably, for to the mood of acquiescence a smile seems to be worth more than an argument. He could recall the thoughts of love, and reanimate them in his imagination, and could love love with the devotion of an old man to the most precious of the things that have been. Some of an old man's jests may be found in *Jocoseria*, some of an old man's imaginative passion in *Asolando*, and in both volumes, and still more clearly in *Ferishtah's Fancies* may be seen an old man's spirit

of acquiescence, or to use a catch-word of Matthew Arnold, the epoch of concentration which follows an epoch of expansion. But the embrace of earth and the things of earth is like the embrace, with a pathos in its ardour, which precedes a farewell. From the first he had recognised the danger on the one hand of settling down to browse contentedly in the paddock of our earthly life, and on the other hand the danger of ignoring our limitations, the danger of attempting to "thrust in earth eternity's concern." In his earlier years he had chiefly feared the first of these two dangers, and even while pointing out, as in *Paracelsus* the errors of the seeker for absolute knowledge or for absolute love, he had felt a certain sympathy with such glorious transgressors. He had valued more than any positive acquisitions of knowledge those "grasps of guess, which pull the more into the less." Now such guesses, such hopes were as precious to him as ever but he set more store than formerly by the certainties —certainties even if illusions—of the general heart of man. These are the forms of thought and feeling divinely imposed upon us; we cannot do better than to accept them; but we must accept them only as provisional, as part of our education on earth, as a needful rung of the ladder by which we may climb to higher things. And the faith which leads to such acquiescence also results in the acceptance of hopes as things not be struggled for but rested in as a substantial portion of the divine order of our lives. In autumn come for spirits rightly attuned these pellucid halcyon days of the Indian summer.

In *Jocoseria*, which appeared in Browning's seventy-first year (1883), he shows nothing of his boisterous

humour, but smiles at our human infirmities from the heights of experience. The prop of Israel, the much-enlightened master, "Eximious Jochanan Ben Sabbathai," when his last hour is at hand has to confess that all his wisdom of life lies in his theoric; in practice he is still an infant; striving presumptuously in boyhood to live an angel, now that he comes to die he is hardly a man. And Solomon himself is no more than man; the truth-compelling ring extorts the confession that an itch of vanity still tickles and teazes him; the Queen of Sheba, seeker for wisdom and patroness of culture, after all likes wisdom best when its exponents are young men tall and proper, and prefers to the solution of the riddles of life by elderly monarchs one small kiss from a fool. Lilith in a moment of terror acknowledges that her dignified reserve was the cloak of passion, and Eve acknowledges that her profession of love was transferred to the wrong man; both ladies recover their self-possession and resume their make-believe decorums, and Adam, like a gallant gentleman, will not see through what is transparent. These are harmless jests at the ironies of life. Browning's best gifts in this volume, that looks pale beside its predecessors, are one or two short lyrics of love, which continue the series of his latest lyrical poems, begun in the exquisite prologue to *La Saisiaz* and the graceful epilogue to *The Two Poets of Croisic*, and continued in the songs of *Ferishtah's Fancies* and *Asolando*—not the least valuable part of the work of his elder years. His strength in this volume of 1883 is put into that protest of human righteousness against immoral conceptions of the Deity uttered by Ixion from his wheel

of torture. Rather than obey an immoral supreme Power, as John Stuart Mill put it, "to Hell I will go"—and such is the cry of Browning's victim of Zeus. He is aware that in his recognition of righteousness he is himself superior to the evil god who afflicts him; and as this righteousness is a moral quality, and no creation of his own consciousness but rather imposed upon it as an eternal law, he rises past Zeus to the Potency above him, after which even the undeveloped sense of a Caliban blindly felt when he discovered a Quiet above the bitter god Setebos; but the Quiet of Caliban is a negation of those evil attributes of the supreme Being, which he reflects upwards from his own gross heart, not the energy of righteousness which Ixion demands in his transcendent "Potency." Into this poem went the energy of Browning's heart and imagination; some of his matured wisdom entered into *Jochanan Hakkadosh*, of which, however, the contents are insufficient to sustain the length. The saint and sage of Israel has at the close of his life found no solution of the riddle of existence. Lover bard, soldier, statist, he has obtained in each of his careers only doubts and dissatisfaction. Twelve months added to a long life by the generosity of his admirers, each of whom surrenders a fragment of his own life to prolong that of the saint, bring him no clearer illumination—still all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Only at the last, when by some unexpected chance, a final opportunity of surveying the past and anticipating the future is granted him, all has become clear. Instead of trying to solve the riddle he accepts it. He sees from his Pisgah how life, with all its confusions and contrarieties, is the school which educates

he soul and fits it for further wayfaring. The ultimate aith of Jochanan the Saint had been already expressed by Browning :

> Over the ball of it,
> Peering and prying,
> How I see all of it,
> Life there, outlying!
> Roughness and smoothness,
> Shine and defilement,
> Grace and uncouthness :
> One reconcilement.

But even to his favourite disciple the sage is unable so to impart the secret that Tsaddik's mind shall really embrace it.

The spirit of the saint of Israel is also the spirit of that wise Dervish of Browning's invention (1884), the Persian Ferishtah. The volume is frankly didactic, and Browning, as becomes a master who would make his lessons easy to children, teaches by parables and pictures. In reading *Ferishtah's Fancies* we might suppose that we were in the Interpreter's House, and that the Interpreter himself was pointing a moral with the robin that has a spider in his mouth, or the hen walking in a fourfold method towards her chickens. The discourses of the Dervish are in the main theological or philosophical ; the lyrics, which are interposed between the discourses or discussions, are amatory. In Persian Poetry much that at first sight might be taken for amatory has in its inner meaning a mystical theological sense. Browning reverses the order of such poetry ; he gives us first his doctrine concerning life or God, and gives it clothed in a parable ; then in a lyric the subject is retracted into the sphere of human affections, and the truth of theology condenses

itself into a corresponding truth respecting the love of man and woman.

Throughout the series of poems it is not a Persian Dervish who is the speaker and teacher; we hear the authentic voice of the Dervish born in Camberwell in the year 1812—Ferishtah-Browning. The doctrine set forth is the doctrine of Browning; the manner of speech is the manner of the poet. The illustrations and imagery are often Oriental; the ideas are those of a Western thinker; yet no sense of discordance is produced. The parable of the starving ravens fed by an eagle serves happily as an induction; let us become not waiters on providence, but workers with providence; and to feed hungry souls is even more needful than to feed hungry bodies:

> I starve in soul:
> So may mankind: and since men congregate
> In towns, not woods—to Ispahan forthwith!

Such is the lesson of energetic charity. And the lesson for the acceptance of providential gifts is that put in words by the poor melon-seller, once the Shah's Prime Minister — words spoken in the spirit of the afflicted Job—"Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?"[1] Or rather—Shall not our hearts even in the midst of evil be lifted up in gratitude at the remembrance of the good which we have received? Browning proceeds, under a transparent veil of Oriental fable, to consider the story of the life of Christ. Do we believe in that tale of wonder

[1] The story of the melon-seller was related by a correspondent of *The Times* in 1846, and is told by Browning in a letter to Miss Barrett of Aug. 6 of that year. Thus subjects of verse rose up in his memory after many years.

in the full sense of the word belief? The more it really concerns us, the more exacting grow our demands for evidence of its truth; an otiose assent is easy, but this has none of the potency of genuine conviction. And, after all, intellectual assent is of little importance compared with that love for the Divine which may co-exist as truly with denial as with assent. *The Family* sets forth, through a parable, the wisdom of accepting and living in our human views of things transcendent. Why pray to God at all? Why not rather accept His will and His Providential disposition of our lives as absolutely wise, and right? That, Browning replies, may be the way of the angels. We are men, and it is God's will that we should feel and think as men:

> Be man and nothing more—
> Man who, as man conceiving, hopes and fears,
> And craves and deprecates, and loves and loathes,
> And bids God help him, till death touch his eyes
> And show God granted most, denying all.

The same spirit of acceptance of our intellectual and moral limitations is applied in *The Sun* to the defence of anthropomorphic religion. Our spirit, burdened with the good gifts of life, looks upward for relief in gratitude and praise; but we can praise and thank only One who is righteous and loving, as we conceive righteousness and love. Let us not strive to pass beyond these human feelings and conceptions. Perhaps they are wholly remote from the unknown reality. They are none the less the conceptions proper to humanity; we have no capacities with which to correct them; let us hold fast by our human best, and preserve, as the preacher very correctly expressed it, "the

integrity of our anthropomorphism." The "magnified non-natural man," and "the three Lord Shaftesburys" of Matthew Arnold's irony are regarded with no fine scorn by the intellect of Browning. His early Christian faith has expanded and taken the non-historical form of a Humanitarian Theism, courageously accepted, not as a complete account of the Unknowable, but as the best provisional conception which we are competent to form. This theism involves rather than displaces the truth shadowed forth in the life of Christ. The crudest theism would seem to him far more reasonable than to direct the religious emotions towards a "stream of tendency."

The presence of evil in a world created and governed by One all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving, is justified in *Mirhab Shah* as a necessity of our education. How shall love be called forth unless there be the possibility of self-sacrifice? (How shall our human sympathy be perfected unless there be pain?) What room is there for thanks to God or love of man if earth be the scene of such a blank monotony of well-being as may be found in the star Rephan? But let us not call evil good, or think pain in itself a gain. God may see that evil is null, and that pain is gain; for us the human view, the human feeling must suffice. This justification of pain as a needful part of an education is, however, inapplicable to never-ending retributive punishment. Such a theological horror Browning rejects with a hearty indignation, qualified only by a humorous contempt, in his apologue of *A Camel-driver*; her driver, if the camel bites, will with good cause thwack, and so instruct the brute that mouth should munch not bite; he will not, six months after

wards, thrust red-hot prongs into the soft of her flesh o hiss there. And God has the advantage over the driver of seeing into the camel's brain and of knowing precisely what moved the creature to offend. The poem which follows is directed against asceticism. Self-sacrifice for the sake of our fellows is indeed "joy beyond joy." As to the rest—the question is not whether we fast or feast, but whether, fasting or feasting, we do our day's work for the Master. If we would supply joy to our fellows, it is needful that we should first know joy ourselves—

Therefore, desire joy and thank God for it!

Browning's argument is not profound, and could adroitly be turned against himself; but his temperament would survive his argument; his capacity for manifold pleasures was great, and he not only valued these as good in themselves, but turned them to admirable uses. A feast of the senses was to him as spiritually precious as a fast might be to one who only by fasting could attain to higher joys than those of sense. And this, he would maintain, is a better condition for a human being than that which renders expedient the plucking out of an eye, the cutting off of a hand. Joy for Browning means praise and gratitude; and in recognising the occasions for such praise and thanks let us not wind ourselves too high. Let us praise God for the little things that are so considerately fitted to our little human wants and desires. The morning-stars will sing together without our help; if we must choose our moment for a *Te Deum*, let it be when we have enjoyed our plate of cherries. The glorious lamp in the Shah's pavilion lightens other

eyes than mine; but to think that the Shah's goodne has provided slippers for my feet in my own sma chamber, and of the very colour that I most affect Nor, in returning thanks, should it cause us troub that our best thanks are poor, or even that they a mingled with an alloy of earthly regards, "mer man's motives——"

> Alas, Friend, what was free from this alloy,—
> Some smatch thereof,—in best and purest love
> Proferred thy earthly father? Dust thou art,
> Dust shall be to the end.

Our little human pleasures—do they seem unworth to meet the eye of God? That is a question put b distrust and spiritual pride. God gives each of us Hi little plot, within which each of us is master. Th question is not what compost, what manure, make fruitful the soil; we need not report to the Lord of th soil the history of our manures; let us treat the groun as seems best, if only we bring sacks to His granar in autumn. Nay, do not I also tickle the palate o my ass with a thistle-bunch, so heartening him to d his work?

In *A Pillar at Sebzevah*, Ferishtah-Browning con fronts the objection that he has deposed knowledg and degraded humanity to the rank of an ass whos highest attainment is to love—what? "Husked lupines, and belike the feeder's self." The Dervis declares without shrinking the faith that is in him:—

> "Friend," quoth Ferishtah, "all I seem to know
> Is—I know nothing save that love I can
> Boundlessly, endlessly."

If there be knowledge it shall vanish away; but charit never faileth. As for knowledge, the prize is in th

rocess; as gain we must mistrust it, not as a road gain:—

> Knowledge means
> Ever-renewed assurance by defeat
> That victory is somehow still to reach,
> But love is victory, the prize itself.

Grasping at the sun, a child captures an orange: hat if he were to scorn his capture and refuse to suck s juice? The curse of life is this—that every sup-osed accession to knowledge, every novel theory, is ccepted as a complete solution of the whole problem, hile every pleasure is despised as transitory or in-ubstantial. In truth the drop of water found in the esert sand is infinitely precious; the mirage is only a irage. Browning, who in this volume puts forth his wn doctrine of theism, his justification of prayer, his elief in a superintending providence, his explanation f the presence of evil in the world, is, of course, no yrrhonist. He profoundly distrusts the capacity of he intellect, acting as a pure organ of speculation, to nriddle the mysteries of existence; he maintains, on he other hand, that knowledge sufficient for the conduct f our lives is involved in the simple experiences of ood and evil, of joy and sorrow. In reality Browning's ttitude towards truth approaches more nearly what as now begun to style itself "Pragmatism" than it pproaches Pyrrhonism; but philosophers whose joy s to beat the air may find that it is condemnatory of heir methods.

In his distrust of metaphysical speculation and in egarding the affections as superior to the intellect, Browning as a teacher has something in common with Comte; but there is perhaps no creed so alien to his

nature as the creed of Positivism. The last of Ferish tah's discourses is concerned with the proportion whic happiness bears to pain in the average life of man, rather—for Browning is nothing if he is not individua istic—in the life of each man as an individual. Th conclusion arrived at is that no "bean-stripe"—eac bean, white or black, standing for a day—is wholl black, and that the more extended is our field of visio the more is the general aspect of the "bean-stripe" a colour intermediate between the extremes of dark ness and of light. Before the poem closes, Browning turns aside to consider the Positivist position. Wh give our thanks and praise for all the good things o life to God, whose existence is an inference of th heart derived from its own need of rendering gratitud to some Being like ourselves? Are not these goo things the gifts of the race, of Humanity, and it worthies who have preceded us and who at the presen moment constitute our environment of loving help Ferishtah's reply, which is far from conclusive, mus be regarded as no discussion of the subject but th utterance of an isolated thought. Praise rendered t Humanity and the heroes of the race simply reverts t the giver of the praise; his own perceptions of wha is praiseworthy alone render praise possible; he mus first of all thank and praise the giver of such percep tions—God. It is strange that Browning should fai to recognise the fact that the Positivist would im mediately trace the power of moral perception to th energies of Humanity in its upward progress fro primitive savagery to our present state of imperfec development.

It has been necessary to transcribe in a reduce

rm the teaching of Ferishtah, for this is the clearest cord left by Browning of his own beliefs on the ost important of all subjects, this is an essential part his criticism of life, and at the same time it is little ss than a passage of autobiography. The poems are dmirable in their vigour, their humour, their serious- ess, their felicity of imagery. Yet the wisdom of *Ferishtah's Fancies* is an old man's wisdom ; we perceive n it the inner life, as Baxter puts it, in speaking of hanges wrought by his elder years, quitting the leaves nd branches and drawing down to the root. But hen in prologue or epilogue to this volume or that Browning touches upon the great happiness, the great orrow of his own life, he is always young. Here the yrical epilogue is inspired by a noble enthusiasm, and loses with a surprise of beauty. What if all his happy aith in the purpose of life, and the Divine presence hrough all its course, were but a reflex from the rivate and personal love that had once been his and vas still above and around him? Such a doubt con- ained its own refutation :—

> Only, at heart's utmost joy and triumph, terror
> Sudden turns the blood to ice : a chill wind disencharms
> All the late enchantment ! What if all be error—
> If the halo irised round my head were, Love, thine arms?

All the more, if this were so, must the speaker's heart urn Godwards in gratitude. The whole design of the olume with its theological parables and its beautiful yrics of human love implies that there is a correspond- ncy between the truths of religion and the truths of he passion of love between man and woman.

Chapter XVII

Closing Works and Days

Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in thei Day, published in 1887, Browning's last volume bu one, betrays not the slightest decline in his menta vigour. It suffers, however, from the fact that severa of the "Parleyings" are discussions—emotional, it i true, as well as intellectual—of somewhat abstrac themes, that these discussions are often prolonged be yond what the subject requires, and that the "Peopl of Importance" are in some instances not men an women, but mere sounding-boards to throw ou Browning's own voice. When certain aspects o principles of art are considered in *Fra Lippo Lipp* before us stands Brother Lippo himself, a living breathing figure, on whom our interest must need fasten whatever may be the subject of his discourse There is of course a propriety in connecting a debat on evil in the world as a means to good with th name of the author of "The Fable of the Bees," ther is no impropriety in connecting a study of the philo sophy of music with the name of Charles Avison th Newcastle organist; but we do not make acquain tance through the parleyings with either Avison o Mandeville. This objection does not apply to all th poems. The parleying *With Daniel Bartoli* is a stor of love and loss, admirable in its presentation of th

eroine and the unheroic hero. We are interested in rancis Furini, "good priest, good man, good painter," efore he begins to preach his somewhat portentous ermon on evolution. And in the case of Christopher mart, the question why once and only once he was a ivinely inspired singer is the question which most irectly leads to a disclosure of his character as a poet. he volume, however, as a whole, while Browning's nergy never flags, has a larger proportion than its redecessors of what he himself terms "mere grey rgument"; and, as if to compensate this, it is re-narkable for sudden outbursts of imagination and assion, as if these repressed for a time had carried way the dykes and dams, and went on their career n full flood. The description of the glory of sunrise n *Bernard de Mandeville*, the description of the hapel in *Christopher Smart*, the praise of a woman's eauty in *Francis Furini*, the amazing succession of ythological *tours de force* in *Gerard de Lairesse*, the elightful picture of the blackcap tugging at his prize, scrap of rag on the garden wall, amid the falling now of March, in the opening of *Charles Avison*—hese are sufficient evidence of the abounding force of rowning's genius as a poet at a date when he had assed the three score years and ten by half an added ecade. Nor would we willingly forget that magical yric of life and death, of the tulip beds and the daisied rave-mound—"Dance, yellows and whites and reds"—which closes *Gerard de Lairesse*. Wordsworth's affodils are hardly a more jocund company than rowning's wind-tossed tulips; he accepts their glad-ess, and yet the starved grass and daisies are more o him than these:

> Daisies and grass be my heart's bed-fellows
> On the mound wind spares and sunshine mellows:
> Dance you, reds and whites and yellows!

Of failure in intellectual or imaginative force th *Parleyings* show no symptom. But the vigour Browning's will did a certain wrong to his oth powers. He did not wait, as in early days, for th genuine casual inspirations of pleasure. He made his task to work out all that was in him. And wh comes to a writer of genius is better than what laboriously sought. We may gather wood for th altar, but the true fire must descend from heave The speed and excitement kindled by one's ow exertions are very different from the varying stre of a wind that bears one onward without the thun and rattle of the engine-room. It would have bee a gain if Browning's indomitable steam-engines ha occasionally ceased to ply, and he had been compelle to wait for a propitious breeze.

Philosophy, Love, Poetry, Politics, Painting (th nude, with a discourse concerning evolution), Paintin again (the modern *versus* the mythological in ar Music, and, if we add the epilogue, the Invention Printing—these are the successive themes of Browning *Parleyings*, and they are important and interestin themes. Unfortunately the method of discussion neither sufficiently abstract for the lucid expositio of ideas, nor sufficiently concrete for the pure com munication of poetic pleasure. Abstract and concre meet and take hands or jostle, too much as skelet and lady might in a *danse Macabre*. The spirit acquiescence—strenuous not indolent acquiescence- with our intellectual limitations is constantly preser

es man groan because he cannot comprehend the nd outside himself which manifests itself in the ? Well, did not Prometheus draw the celestial rs into the pin-point of a flame which man can ler, and which does him service? Is the fire a le thing beside the immensity in the heavens ove us?

> Little? In little, light, warmth, life are blessed—
> Which, in the large, who sees to bless?

again—it is Christopher Smart, who triumphs for ce so magnificently in his "Song to David," and ls, with all his contemporaries, in the poetry of nbitious instruction. And why? Because for once was content with the first step that poetry should ke—to confer enjoyment, leaving instruction—the uit of enjoyment—to come later. True learning aches through love and delight, not through pre-ntious didactics,—a truth forgotten by the whole tribe eighteenth century versifiers. And once more—es Francis Furini paint the naked body in all its auty? Right! let him study precisely this divine ing the body, before he looks upward; let him retire om the infinite into his proper circumscription:

> Only by looking low, ere looking high,
> Comes penetration of the mystery.

So also with our view of the mingled good and evil the world; perhaps to some transcendent vision evil ay wholly disappear; perhaps we shall ourselves make is discovery as we look back upon the life on earth. leanwhile it is as men that we must see things, and ven if evil be an illusion (as Browning trusts), it is a

needful illusion in our educational process, since throu
evil we become aware of good. Thus at every po
Browning accepts here, as in *Ferishtah's Fancies*,
limited provisional knowledge as sufficient for c
present needs, with a sustaining hope which exten
into the future. On the other hand, if your affair
not the sincerity of thought and feeling, but a desi
to rule the mass of men for your own advantage, y
must act in a different spirit. Do not, in the mann
of Bubb Doddington, attempt to impose upon yo
fellows with the obvious and worn-out pretence th
all you do has been undertaken on their behalf a
in their interests. There is a newer and a bett
trick than that. Assume the supernatural; have
"mission"; have a "message"; be earnest, with
the authority of a divine purpose. Play boldly th
new card of statesmanship, and you may have fro
time to time as many inconsistent missions a
messages as ambitious statecraft can suggest to yo
Through all your gyrations the admiring crowd w
still stand agape. Was Browning's irony of a cynic
philosophy of statesmanship suggested by his view
the procedure of a politician, whom he had on
admired, whose talents he still recognised, but fro
whom he now turned away with indignant aversion
However this may have been, his poems which tou
on politics do not imply that respect for the peop
thinking, feeling, and moving, in masses which is
common profession with the liberal leaders of t
platform. Browning's liberalism was a form of h
individualism; he, like Shakespeare, had a sympath
with the wants and affections of the humblest huma
lives; and, like Shakespeare, he thought that fooli

incompetent heads are often conjoined with hearts
t in a high degree deserve respect.

Asolando, the last volume of a long array, was
blished in London on the last day of Browning's
. As he lay dying in Venice, telegraphed tidings
ched his son of the eager demand for copies made
anticipation of its appearance and of the instant
l appreciative reviews; Browning heard the report
h a quiet gratification. It is happy when praise in
parting is justified, and this was the case with a
lection of poems which to some readers seemed like
evival of the poetry of its author's best years of
ly and mid manhood. *Asolando* is, however, in the
in distinctly an autumn gathering, a handful of
wers and fruit belonging to the Indian summer of
genius. The Prologue is a confession, like that of
ordsworth's great Ode, that a glory has passed away
m the earth. When first he set eyes on Asolo,
ne fifty years previously, the splendour of Italian
ndscape seemed that of

> Terror with beauty, like the Bush
> Burning yet unconsumed

ow, while the beauty remains, the flame is extinct—
he Bush is bare." Browning finds his consolation in
e belief that he has come nearer to the realities of
rth by discarding fancies, and that his wonder and awe
e more wisely directed towards the transcendent God
an towards His creatures. But in truth what the
nd confers is a fact and no fancy; the loss of what
owning calls the "soul's iris-bow" is the loss of a
bstantial, a divine possession. The *Epilogue* has in
a certain energy, but the thews are those of an old

athlete, and through the energy we are conscious
the strain. The speaker pitches his voice high, as
it could not otherwise be heard at a distance. T
Reverie, a speculation on the time when Power w
show itself fully and therefore be known as love, h
some of that vigorous intellectual garrulity which ha
grown on Browning during the years when unhappi
for his poetry he came to be regarded chiefly as
prophet and a sage. An old man rightly values th
truths which experience has made real for him ; h
repeats them again and again, for they constitute th
best gift he can offer to his disciples ; but his utteranc
are not always directly inspired ; they are sometim
faintly echoed from an earlier inspiration. In th
Reverie, while accepting our limitations of knowledg
which he can term ignorance in its contrast with th
vast unknown, Browning discovers in the moral co
sciousness of man a prophecy of the ultimate triump
of good over what we think of as evil, a prophecy
the final reconciliation of love with power. An
among the laws of life is not merely submission bu
aspiration :

> Life is—to wake not sleep,
> Rise and not rest, but press
> From earth's level where blindly creep
> Things perfected, more or less,
> To the heaven's height, far and steep,
> Where amid what strifes and storms
> May wait the adventurous quest,
> Power is love.

The voice of the poet of *Paracelsus* and of *Rabbi Be*
Ezra is still audible in this latest of his prophesying
And therefore he welcomes earth in his *Rephan*, eart

th its whole array of failures and despairs, as the fit ining-ground for man. Better its trials and losses d crosses than a sterile uniformity of happiness; tter its strife than rest in any golden mean of ex- llence. Nor are its intellectual errors and illusions thout their educational value. It is better, as *evelopment*, with its recollections of Browning's child- od, assures us that the boy should believe in Troy ege, and the combats of Hector and Achilles, as ritable facts of history, than bend his brow over olf's Prolegomena or perplex his brain with moral ilosophies to grapple with which his mind is not t competent. By and by his illusions will disappear hile their gains will remain.

The general impression left by *Asolando* is that of tellectual and imaginative vigour. The series of *ad Dreams* is very striking and original in both ctorial and passionate power. *Dubiety* is a poem of e Indian Summer, but it has the beauty, with a uch of the pathos, proper to the time. The love ngs are rather songs of praise than of passion, but ey are beautiful songs of praise, and that entitled *peculative*, which is frankly a poem of old age, has it the genuine passion of memory. *White Witch- aft* does in truth revive the manner of earlier olumes. The

> Infinite passion and the pain
> Of finite hearts that yearn

ld of in a poem of 1855 is present, with a touch of umour to guard it from its own excess in the admir- ble *Inapprehensiveness*. The speaker who may not berate his soul can perhaps identify a quotation, and

he gallantly accepts his humble rôle in the tra comedy of foiled passion :—

> "No, the book
> Which noticed how the wall-growths wave," said she,
> "Was not by Ruskin."
> I said "Vernon Lee."

And in the uttered "Vernon Lee" lies a vast renunc tion half comical and wholly tragic. There are je in the volume, and these, with the exception of *Po dell' Angelo*, have the merit of brevity; they bu swiftly in and out, and do not wind about us with t terror of voluminous coils, as sometimes happens wh Browning is in his mood of mirth. There are stori and they are told with spirit and with skill. *Beatrice Signorini* the story-teller does justice to t honest jealousy of a wife and to the honest love of husband who returns from the wanderings of l imagination to the frank fidelity of his hea Cynicism grows genial in the jest of *The Pope a the Net*. In *Muckle-Mouth Meg*, laughter and kiss audible from the page, and a woman's art in love-cra turn tragedy into a hearty piece of comedy. *The Bea Feast* presents us with the latest transformation of t Herakles ideal, where a good Christian Herakles, Po Sixtus of Rome, makes common cause with his spiritu children in their humble pleasures of the senses. And contrast with this poem of the religion of joy is the sto of another ruler of Rome, the too fortunate Emper Augustus, who, in the shadow of the religion of fe and sorrow, must propitiate the envy of Fate by tur ing beggar once a year. A shivering thrill ru through us as we catch a sight of the supren

ndicant's "sparkling eyes beneath their eyebrows' ge":

> "He's God!" shouts Lucius Varus Rufus: "Man
> And worms'-meat any moment!" mutters low
> Some Power, admonishing the mortal-born.

ere were nobler sides of Paganism than this with ich Browning seems never to have had an adequate mpathy. And yet the religion even of Marcus ırelius lacked something of the joy of the religion the thankful Pope who feasted upon beans.[1]

In the winter which followed his change of abode from arwick Crescent to the more commodious house in Vere Gardens, the winter of 1887-1888, Browning's alth and strength visibly declined; a succession of hausting colds lowered his vitality; yet he main-ned his habitual ways of life, and would not yield. August 1888 he started ill for his Italian holiday, and .velled with difficulty and distress. But the rest ıong the mountains at Primiero restored him. At enice he seemed as vigorous as he was joyous. And ıen he returned to London in February 1889 the provement in his strength was in a considerable easure maintained. Yet it was evident that the

Mrs Orr gives the dates of composition of several of the *Asolando* ms. *Rosny*, *Beatrice Signorini* and *Flute-Music* were written in the ter of 1887-1888. Two or three of the *Bad Dreams* are, with less fidence, assigned to the same date. The *Ponte dell' Angelo* "was gined during the next autumn in Venice" (see Mrs Bronson's article rowning in Venice"). "*White Witchcraft* had been suggested in the e summer [1888] by a letter from a friend in the Channel Islands ch spoke of the number of toads to be seen there." *The Cardinal the Dog*, written with the *Pied Piper* for Macready's son, is a poem of y date. Mrs Bronson in her article "Browning in Asolo" (*Century gazine*, April 1900) relates the origin at Asolo 1889 of *The Lady and Painter*.

physical vigour which had seemed invincible was
the ebb. In the early summer he paid the last
those visits, which he so highly valued, to Ball
College, Oxford. The opening week of June fou
him at Cambridge. Mr Gosse has told how on t
first Sunday of that month Browning and he s
together " in a sequestered part of the beautiful Fello
Garden of Trinity," under a cloudless sky, amid t
early foliage with double hawthorns in bloom, a
how the old man, in a mood of serenity and witho
his usual gesticulation, talked of his own early life a
aspirations. He shrank that summer, says Mrs O
from the fatigue of a journey to Italy and thought
Scotland as a place of rest. But unfavourable weath
in early August forbade the execution of the pl
An invitation from Mrs Bronson to her house at Aso
to be followed by the pleasure of seeing his son a
his son's wife in the Palazzo Rezzonico, Venice, we
attractions not to be resisted, and in company wi
Miss Browning, he reached the little hill-town th
had grown so dear to him without mishap and ev
without fatigue.

To the early days of July, shortly before his departu
for Italy, belong two incidents which may be plac
side by side as exhibiting two contrasted sides
Browning's character. On the 5th of that month
dined with the Shah, who begged for the gift of o
of his books. Next day he chose a volume the bin
ing of which might, as he says, " take the imperial eye
but the pleasure of the day was another gift, a gift
a person who was not imperial. " I said to myse
he wrote to his young friend the painter Lehman
daughter, addressed in the letter as " My belov

ma"—"I said to myself 'Here do I present my
etry to a personage for whom I do not care three
aws; why should I not venture to do as much for
young lady I love dearly, who, for the author's sake,
l not impossibly care rather for the inside than the
tside of the volume?' So I was bold enough to
ke one and offer it for your kind acceptance, begging
u to remember in days to come that the author,
ether a good poet or not, was always, my Alma,
ur affectionate friend, Robert Browning." A gracious
wing of old age over the grace and charm of youth!
t the work of two days later, July 8th, was not
acious. The lines "To Edward Fitzgerald," printed
The Athenæum, were dated on that day. It is stated
Mrs Orr that when they were despatched to the
urnal in which they appeared, Browning regretted
e deed, though afterwards he found reasons to justify
mself. Fitzgerald's reference to Mrs Browning caused
m a spasm of pain and indignation, nor did the pain
r long subside. The expression of his indignation
as outrageous in manner, and deficient in real power.
e had read a worse meaning into the unhappy words
an had been intended, and the writer was dead.
owning's act was like an involuntary muscular con-
action, which he could not control. The lines sprang
r more from love than from hate. "I felt as if she
d died yesterday," he said. We cannot regret that
owning was capable of such an offence; we can
ly regret that what should have controlled his
y of pain and rage did not operate at the right
oment.

In Asolo, beside "the gate," Mrs Bronson had found
d partly made what Mr Henry James describes as

"one of the quaintest possible little places of *villeggiatura*"—La Mura, the house, "resting half upon the dismantled, dissimulated town-wall. No sweeter spot in all the sweetnesses of Italy." Browning's last visit to Asolo was a time of almost unmingled enjoyment. "He seemed possessed," writes Mrs Orr, "by a strange buoyancy, an almost feverish joy in life. The thought that he was in Asolo again, which he had first seen in his twenty-sixth year, and since then had never ceased to remember with affection, was a happy wonder to him. He would stand delighted on the loggia of La Mura, looking out over the plain and identifying the places of historical interest, some of which were connected with his own "Sordello." Nor was the later story forgotten of Queen Caterina Cornaro, whose palace-tower overlooks Asolo, and whose secretary, Cardinal Bembo, wrote *gli Asolani*, from which came the suggestion for the title of Browning's forthcoming volume. At times, as Mrs Bronson relates, the beauty of the prospect was enough, with no historical reminiscences, the plain with its moving shadows, the mountain-ranges to the west, and southwards the delicate outline of the Euganean Hills. "I was right," said he, "to fall in love with this place fifty years ago, was I not?"

The procedure of the day at Asolo was almost as regular as that of a London day. The morning was with his sister, when everything that was notable was noted by his keen eyes, the return, English newspapers, proof-sheets, correspondence, the light mid-day meal, the afternoon drive in Mrs Bronson's carriage, tea upon the loggia, the evening with music or reading, or visits to the little theatre—these constituted an almost un-

arying and happy routine. On his walks he delighted
o recognise little details of architecture which he had
bserved in former years; or he would peer into the
edgerows and watch the living creatures that lurked
here, or would "whistle softly to the lizards basking
n the low walls which border the roads, to try his old
ower of attracting them."[1] Sometimes a longer drive
nd that to Bassano was his favourite) required an
arlier start in the carriage with luncheon at some
ttle inn. "If we were ever late in returning to Asolo,"
Irs Bronson writes, "he would say 'Tell Vittorio to
rive quickly; we must not lose the sunset from the
oggia.' . . . Often after a storm, the effects of sun
reaking through clouds before its setting, combined
ith the scenery of plain and mountain, were such as
o rouse the poet to the greatest enthusiasm. Heedless
f cold or damp, forgetting himself completely, though
armly wrapped to please others, he would gaze on
he changing aspects of earth and sky until darkness
overed everything from his sight."

When in the evenings Browning read aloud he did
ot, like Tennyson, as described by Mr Rossetti, allow
is voice to "sway onward with a long-drawn chaunt"
hich gave "noble value and emphasis to the metrical
ructure and pauses." His delivery was full and dis-
nctive, but it "took much less account than Tennyson's
f the poem as a rhythmical whole; his delivery had
ore affinity to that of an actor, laying stress on all
he light and shade of the composition—its touches of
haracter, the conversational points, its dramatic give-
nd-take. In those qualities of elocution in which
ennyson was strong, and aimed to be strong, Brown-

[1] Mrs Orr, *Life*, p. 414.

ing was contentedly weak; and *vice versâ*."[1] Som
times, like another great poet, Pope, he was deep
affected by the passion of beauty or heroism or path
in what he read, and could not control his feeling
Mrs Orr mentions that in reading aloud his translatio
of the *Herakles*, he, like Pope in reading a passage
his *Iliad*, was moved to tears. Dr Furnivall tells
the mounting excitement with which he once delivere
in the writer's hearing his *Ixion*. When at La Mu
after his dreamy playing, on a spinet of 1522, old air
melodious, melancholy airs, Browning would propos
to read aloud, it was not his own poetry that he mo
willingly chose. "No R. B. to-night," he would say
"then with a smile, 'Let us have some real poetry'"
and the volume would be one by Shelley or Keats,
Coleridge or Tennyson. It was as a punishment
his hostess for the crime of having no Shakespeare o
her shelves that he threatened her with one of h
"toughest poems"; but the tough poem, interprete
by his emphasis and pauses, became "as clear an
comprehensible as one could possibly desire." In h
talk at Asolo "he seemed purposely to avoid deep an
serious topics. If such were broached in his presen
he dismissed them with one strong, convincing sentenc
and adroitly turned the current of conversation into
shallower channel."

A project which came very near his heart was th
of purchasing from the municipal authorities a sma
piece of ground, divided from La Mura by a ravi
clothed with olive and other trees, "on which stood
unfinished building"—the words are Mrs Bronson

[1] W. M. Rossetti, Portraits of Browning, i., *Magazine of Art*, 1890,
182. Mr Rossetti's words refer to an earlier period.

—" commanding the finest view in Asolo." He desired uch to have a summer or autumn abode to which e might turn with the assurance of rest in what most eased and suited him. In imagination, with his aracteristic eagerness, he had already altered and lded to the existing structure, and decided on the ze and aspect of the loggia which was to out-rival at of La Mura. " 'It shall have a tower,' he said, vhence I can see Venice at every hour of the day, id I shall call it "Pippa's Tower." . . . We will row a rustic bridge across the streamlet in the vine.' " And then, in a graver mood: "It may ot be for me to enjoy it long—who can say? But will be useful for Pen and his family. . . . But I n good for ten years yet." And when his son sited Asolo and approved of the project of Pippa's ower, Browning's happiness in his dream was com-ete. It was on the night of his death that the thorities of Asolo decided that the purchase might carried into effect.

For a time during this last visit to Asolo Browning ffered some inconvenience from shortness of breath climbing hills, but the discomfort passed away. e looked forward to an early return to England, oke with pleasant anticipation of the soft-pedal ano which his kind friend Mrs Bronson desired to ocure at Boston and place in his study in De Vere ardens, and he dreamed of future poetical achieve-ents. "Shall I whisper to you my ambition and my pe?" he asked his hostess. "It is to write a tragedy tter than anything I have done yet. I think of it nstantly." With the end of October the happy days Asolo were at an end. On the first of November

he was in Venice, "magnificently lodged," he say
"in this vast palazzo, which my son has really shov
himself fit to possess, so surprising are his restor
tions and improvements." At Asolo he had parte
from his American friend Story with the word
"More than forty years of friendship and never
break." In Venice he met an American friend
more recent years, Professor Corson, who describ
him as stepping briskly, with a look that went ever
where, and as cheerfully anticipating many more yea
of productive work.[1] Yet in truth the end was nea
Dining with Mr and Mrs Curtis, where he read alou
some poems of his forthcoming volume, he met
London physician, Dr Bird. Next evening Dr Bi
again dined with Browning, who expressed confide
satisfaction as to his state of health, and held out h
wrist that his words might be confirmed by the r
gularity and vigour of his pulse. The physician b
came at once aware that Browning's confidence w
far from receiving the warrant in which he believe
Still he maintained his customary two hours' wa
each day. Towards the close of November, on a da
of fog, he returned from the Lido with symptoms
a bronchial cold. He dealt with the trouble as
was accustomed, and did not take to his bed. Thoug
feeling scarcely fit to travel he planned his departu
for England after the lapse of four or five days.
December 1st, an Italian physician was summone
and immediately perceived the gravity of the ca
Within a few days the bronchial trouble was subdue
but failure of the heart was apparent. Some hou

[1] "The Nation," vol. l., where reminiscences by Moncure Conway m
also be found.

efore the end he said to one of his nurses, "I feel uch worse. I know now that I must die." The bbing away of life was painless. As the clocks of enice were striking ten on the night of Thursday, December 12, 1889, Browning died.[1]

He had never concerned himself much about his lace of burial. A lifeless body seemed to him only n old vesture that had been cast aside. "He had aid to his sister in the foregoing summer," Mrs Orr ells us, "that he wished to be buried wherever he night die; if in England, with his mother; if in rance, with his father; if in Italy, with his wife." he English cemetery in Florence had, however, been losed. The choice seemed to lie between Venice, hich was the desire of the city, or, if the difficulties ould be overcome by the intervention of Lord ufferin, the old Florentine cemetery. The matter as decided otherwise; a grave in Westminster Abbey as proposed by Dean Bradley, and the proposal was ccepted.[2] A private service took place in the alazzo Rezzonico; the coffin, in compliance with he civic requirements, was conveyed with public onours to the chapel on the island of San Michele; nd from thence to the house in De Vere Gardens. n the last day of the year 1889, in presence of a

[1] "My father died without pain or suffering other than that of weakess or weariness"—so Mr R. Barrett Browning wrote to Mrs Bloomfield-loore. "His death was what death ought to be, but rarely is—so said he doctor." (Quoted in an article on Browning by Mrs Bloomfield-loore in Lippincott's Magazine—Jan.—June 1890, p. 690.)

[2] A grave in the Abbey was at the same time offered for the body of rowning's wife; the removal of her body from Florence would have een against both the wishes of Browning and of the people of Florence. t was therefore declined by Mr R. Barrett Browning. See his letter in Irs Bloomfield-Moore's article in Lippincott's Magazine, vol. xlv.

great and reverent crowd, with solemn music arrange for the words of Mrs Browning's poem, "He giveth his beloved sleep," the body of Browning was laid in its resting-place in Poets' Corner.

To attempt at the present time to determine the place of Browning in the history of English poetry is perhaps premature. Yet the record of "How it strikes a contemporary" may itself have a certain historical interest. When estimates of this kind have been revised by time even their errors are sometimes instructive, or, if not instructive, are amusing. It is probable that Tennyson will remain as the chief representative in poetry of the Victorian period Browning, who was slower in securing an audience may be found to possess a more independent individuality. Yet in truth no great writer is independent of the influences of his age.

Browning as a poet had his origins in the romantic school of English poetry; but he came at a time when the romance of external action and adventure had exhausted itself, and when it became necessary to carry romance into the inner world where the adventures are those of the soul. On the ethical and religious side he sprang from English Puritanism. Each of these influences was modified by his own genius and by the circumstances of its development. His keen observation of facts and passionate inquisition of human character drew him in the direction of what is termed realism. This combination of realism with romance is even more strikingly seen in an elder contemporary on whose work Browning bestowed an ardent admiration, the novelist Balzac

His Puritanism received important modifications from is wide-ranging artistic instincts and sympathies, and gain from the liberality of a wide-ranging intellect. He has the strenuous moral force of Puritanism, but he : wholly free from asceticism, except in the higher ignificance of that word—the hardy discipline of an thlete. Opinions count for less than the form and the abitual attitudes of a soul. These with Browning were lways essentially Christian. He regarded our life on arth as a state of probation and of preparation; ometimes as a battle-field in which our test lies in ne choice of the worse or the better side and the nergy of devotion to the cause; sometimes as a chool of education, in the processes of which the motions play a larger part than the intellect. The egrees in that school are not to be taken on earth. And on the battle-field the final issue is not to be etermined here, so that what appears as defeat may ontain within it an assured promise of ultimate ictory. The attitudes of the spirit which were ost habitual with him were two—the attitude of spiration and the attitude of submission. These he rought into harmony with each other by his con-eption of human life as a period of training for a igher life; we must make the most vigorous and oyous use of our schooling, and yet we must press owards what lies beyond it.

From the romantic poetry of the early years of the ineteenth century comes a cry or a sigh of limitless esire. Under the inspiration of the Revolutionary ovement passion had broken the bounds of the ighteenth century ideal of balance and moderation. Vith the transcendental reaction against a mechanical

view of the relation of God to the universe and t humanity the soul had put forth boundless claims an unmeasured aspirations. In his poetic method eac writer followed the leadings of his own genius, withou reference to common rules and standards; the in dividualism of the Revolutionary epoch asserted itsel to the full. These several influences helped t determine the character of Browning's poetry. Bu meeting in him the ethical and religious tendencies o English Puritanism they acquired new significance and assumed new forms. The cry of desire could no turn, as it did with Byron, to cynicism; it must no waste itself, as sometimes happened with Shelley, i the air or the ether. It must be controlled by th will and turned to some spiritual uses. The trans cendental feeling which Wordsworth most ofte attained through an impassioned contemplation o external nature must rest upon a broader basis an include among its sources or abettors all the highe passions of humanity. The Revolutionary indi vidualism must be maintained and extended; in hi methods Browning would acknowledge no master; h would please himself and compel his readers to accep his method even if strange or singular. As for th mediæval revival, which tried to turn aside, and in pa capture, the transcendental tendencies of his tim Browning rejected it, in the old temper of Englis Puritanism, on the side of religion; but on the sid of art it opened certain avenues upon which h eagerly entered. The scientific movement of th nineteenth century influenced him partly as a forc to be met and opposed by his militant transcenden alism. Yet he gives definite expression in *Paracelsu*

an idea of evolution both in nature and in human society, an idea of evolution which is, however, essentially theistic. "All that seems proved in Darwin's scheme," he wrote to Dr Furnivall in 1881, was a conception familiar to me from the beginning." The positive influences of the scientific age in which he lived upon Browning's work were chiefly these— first it tended to intellectualise his instincts, compelling him to justify them by a definite theory; and secondly it co-operated with his tendency towards realism as a student of the facts of human nature; it urged him towards research in his psychology of the passions; it supported him in his curious inquisition of the phenomena of the world of mind.

Being a complete and a sane human creature, Browning could not rest content with the vicious asceticism of the intellect which calls itself scientific because it refuses to recognise any facts that are not material and tangible. Science itself, in the true sense of the word, exists and progresses by ventures of imaginative faith. And in all matters which involve good and evil, hopes and fears, in all matters which determine the conduct of life, no rational person excludes from his view the postulates of our moral nature or should exclude the final option of the will. The person whose beliefs are determined by material facts alone and by the understanding unallied with our other powers is the irrational and unscientific person. Being a complete and sane human creature, Browning was assured that the visible order of things is part of a larger order, the existence of which alone makes human life intelligible to the reason. The understanding being incapable of arriving unaided at a

decision between rival theories of life, and neutrality between these being irrational and illegitimate, he rightly determined the balance with the weight of emotion, and rightly acted upon that decision with all the energy of his will. His chief intellectual error was not that he undervalued the results of the intellect, but that he imagined the existence as a part of sane human nature, of a wholly irrational intellect which in affairs of religious belief and conduct is indifferent to the promptings of the emotions and the moral nature.

Browning's optimism has been erroneously ascribed to his temperament. He declared that in his personal experience the pain of life outweighed its pleasure. He remembered former pain more vividly than he remembered pleasure. His optimism was part of the vigorous sanity of his moral nature; like a reasonable man, he made the happiness which he did not find. If any person should censure the process of giving objective validity to a moral postulate, he has only to imagine some extra-human intelligence making a study of human nature; to such an intelligence our moral postulates would be objective facts and have the value of objective evidence. That whole of which our life on earth forms a part could not be conceived by Browning as rational without also being conceived as good.

All the parts of Browning's nature were vigorous and they worked harmoniously together. His senses were keen and alert; his understanding was both penetrating and comprehensive; his passions had sudden explosive force and also steadfastness and persistency; his will supported his other powers and

perhaps it had too large a share in his later creative work. His feeling for external nature was twofold; he enjoyed colour and form—but especially colour—as a feast for the eye, and returned thanks for his meal as the Pope of his poem did for the bean-feast. This was far removed from that passionate spiritual contemplation of nature of the Wordsworthian mood. But now and again for Browning external nature was, not indeed suffused as for Wordsworth, but pierced and shot through with spiritual fire. His chief interest, however, was in man. The study of passions in their directness and of the intellect in its tortuous ways were at various times almost equally attractive to him. The emotions which he chiefly cared to interpret were those connected with religion, with art, and with the relations of the sexes.

In his presentation of character Browning was far from exhibiting either the universality or the disinterestedness of Shakespeare. His sympathy with action was defective. The affections arising from hereditary or traditional relations are but slenderly represented in his poetry; the passions which elect their own objects are largely represented. Those graceful gaieties arising from a long-established form of society, which constitute so large a part of Shakespeare's comedies, are almost wholly absent from his work. His humour was robust but seldom fine or delicate. In an age of intellectual and spiritual conflict and trouble, his art was often deflected from the highest ends by his concern on behalf of ideas. He could not rest satisfied, it has been observed, with contemplating the children of his imagination, nor find the fulfilment of his aim in the fact of having given

them existence.[1] It seems often as if his purpose in creating them was to make them serve as questioners objectors, and answerers in the great debate of conflicting thoughts which proceeds throughout his poems His object in transferring his own consciousness into the consciousness of some imagined personage seems often to be that of gaining a new stand-point from which to see another and a different aspect of the questions concerning which he could not wholly satisfy himself from any single point of view. He cannot be content to leave his men and women, in Shakespeare's disinterested manner, to look in various directions according to whatever chanced to suit best the temper and disposition he had imagined for them. They are placed by him with their eyes turned in very much the same direction, gazing towards the same problems the same ideas. And somehow Browning himself seems to be in company with them all the time, learning their different reports of the various aspects which those problems or ideas present to each of them, and choosing between the different reports in order to give credence to that which seems true. The study of no individual character would seem to him of capital value unless that character contained something which should help to throw light upon matters common to all humanity, upon the inquiries either as to what it is or as to what are its relations to the things outside humanity. This is not quite the highest form of dramatic poetry. There is in it perhaps something

[1] E. D. West in the first of two papers, "Browning as a Preacher," in *The Dark Blue Magazine*. Browning esteemed these papers highly and in what follows I appropriate, with some modifications, a passage from the first of them. The writer has consented to the use here made of the passage, and has contributed a passage towards the close.

the error of seeking too quick returns of profit, and drawing "a circle premature," to use Browning's vn words, "heedless of far gain." The contents of aracters so conceived can be exhausted, whereas when aracters are presented with entire disinterestedness ey may seem to yield us less at first, but they e inexhaustible. The fault—if it be one—lay partly Browning's epoch, partly in the nature of his genius. uch a method of deflected dramatic characterisation ; his is less appropriate to regular drama than to the onologue ; and accordingly the monologue, reflective lyrical, became the most characteristic instrument his art.

There is little of repose in Browning's poetry. He ared lethargy of heart, the supine mood, more than e feared excess of passion. Once or twice he utters sigh for rest, but it is for rest after strife or labour. road spaces of repose, of emotional tranquillity are re, if not entirely wanting, in his poetry. It is not high table-land, but a range, or range upon range, of erras. In single poems there is often a point or oment in which passion suddenly reaches its lmination. He flashes light upon the retina ; he es not spread truth abroad like a mantle but plunges downwards through the mists of earth like a search-g sword-blade. And therefore he does not always stribute the poetic value of what he writes equally ; e vivid moment justifies all that is preparatory to at great moment. His utterance, which is always gorous, becomes intensely luminous at the needful ints and then relapses, to its well-maintained vigour, vigour not always accompanied by the highest etical qualities. The music of his verse is entirely

original, and so various are its kinds, so complex ofte
are its effects that it cannot be briefly characterise
Its attack upon the ear is often by surprises, which
corresponding to the sudden turns of thought an
leaps of feeling, justify themselves as right an
delightful. Yet he sometimes embarrasses his vers
with an excess of suspensions and resolutions
Browning made many metrical experiments, som
of which were unfortunate; but his failures ar
rather to be ascribed to temporary lapses into
misdirected ingenuity than to the absence of metrica
feeling.

His chief influence, other than what is purel
artistic, upon a reader is towards establishing a con
nection between the known order of things in whic
we live and move and that larger order of which it i
a part. He plays upon the will, summoning it fro
lethargy to activity. He spiritualises the passions b
showing that they tend through what is human to
wards what is divine. He assigns to the intellect
sufficient field for exercise, but attaches more valu
to its efforts than to its attainments. His faith in a
unseen order of things creates a hope which persist
through the apparent failures of earth. In a tru
sense he may be named the successor of Wordsworth
not indeed as an artist but as a teacher. Substanti
ally the creed maintained by each was the same creed
and they were both more emphatic proclaimers of i
than any other contemporary poets. But their way
of holding and of maintaining that creed were fa
apart. Wordsworth enunciated his doctrines as if h
had never met with, and never expected to meet with
any gainsaying of them. He discoursed as a philosophe

ight to a school of disciples gathered together to be ught by his wisdom, not to dispute it. He feared iefly not a counter creed but the materialising effects the industrial movement of his own day. Expect- g no contradiction, Wordsworth did not care to quit s own standpoint in order that he might see how ings appear from the opposing side. He did not gue but let his utterance fall into a half soliloquy oken in presence of an audience but not always rectly addressed to them. Browning's manner of eech was very unlike this. He seems to address it ten to unsympathetic hearers of whose presence and ainsaying attitude he could not lose sight. The eliefs for which he pleaded were not in his day, as ey had been in Wordsworth's, part of a progressive ave of thought. He occupied the disadvantageous sition of a conservative thinker. The later poet of iritual beliefs had to make his way not with, but gainst, a great incoming tide of contemporary specula- on. Probably on this account Browning's influence a teacher will extend over a far shorter space of me than that of Wordsworth. For Wordsworth is lf-contained, and is complete without reference to e ideas which oppose his own. His work suffices r its own explanation, and will always commend self to certain readers either as the system of a ilosophic thinker or as the dream of a poet. Brown- g's thought where it is most significant is often more less enigmatical if taken by itself: its energetic estures, unless we see what they are directed gainst, seem aimless beating the air. His thought, far as it is polemical, will probably cease to — terest future readers. New methods of attack will

call forth new methods of defence. Time wi
make its discreet selection from his writings. An
the portion which seems most likely to survive
that which presents in true forms of art the pe
manent passions of humanity and characters of endu
ing interest.

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